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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy & Science Fiction

JANUARY

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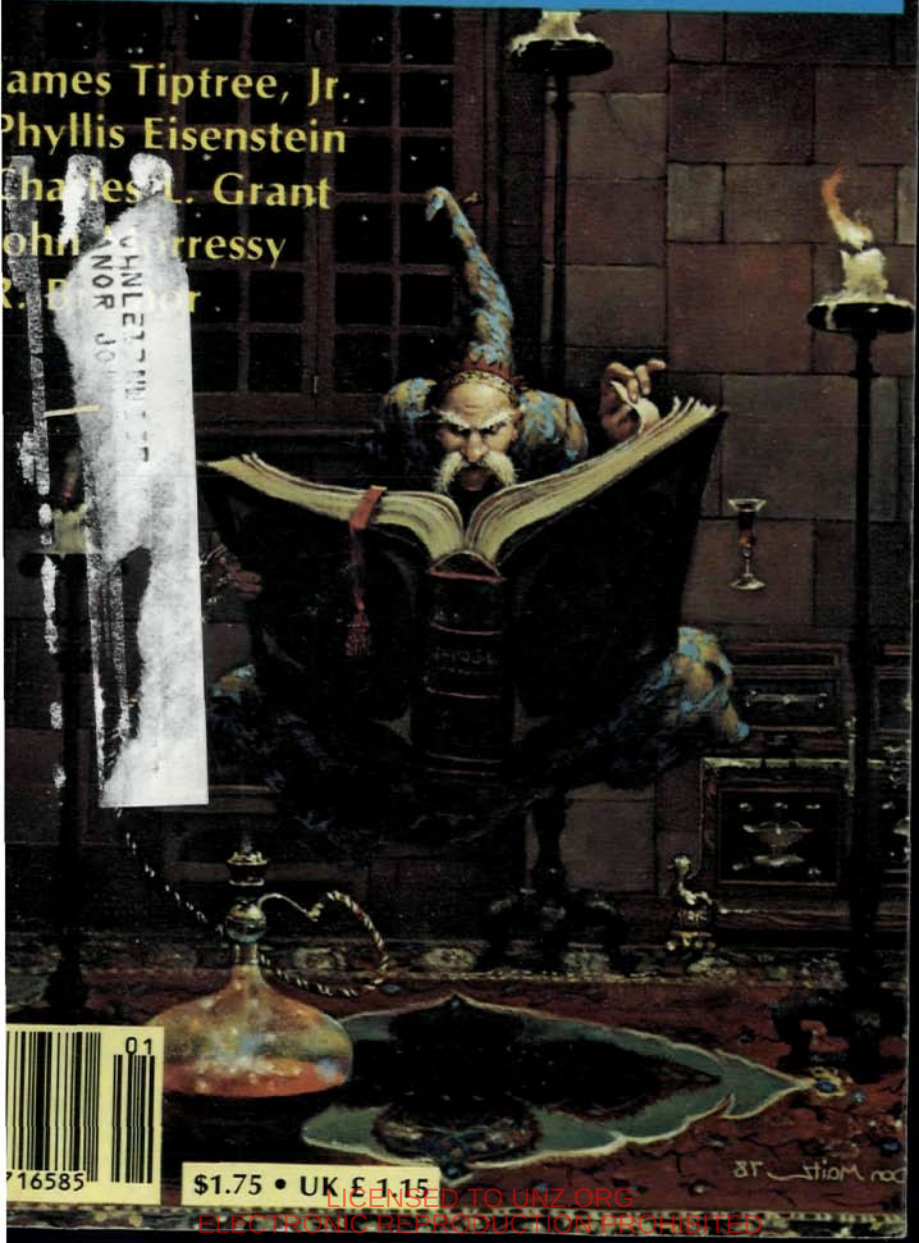

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TIMESCAPE

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Roger Zelazny

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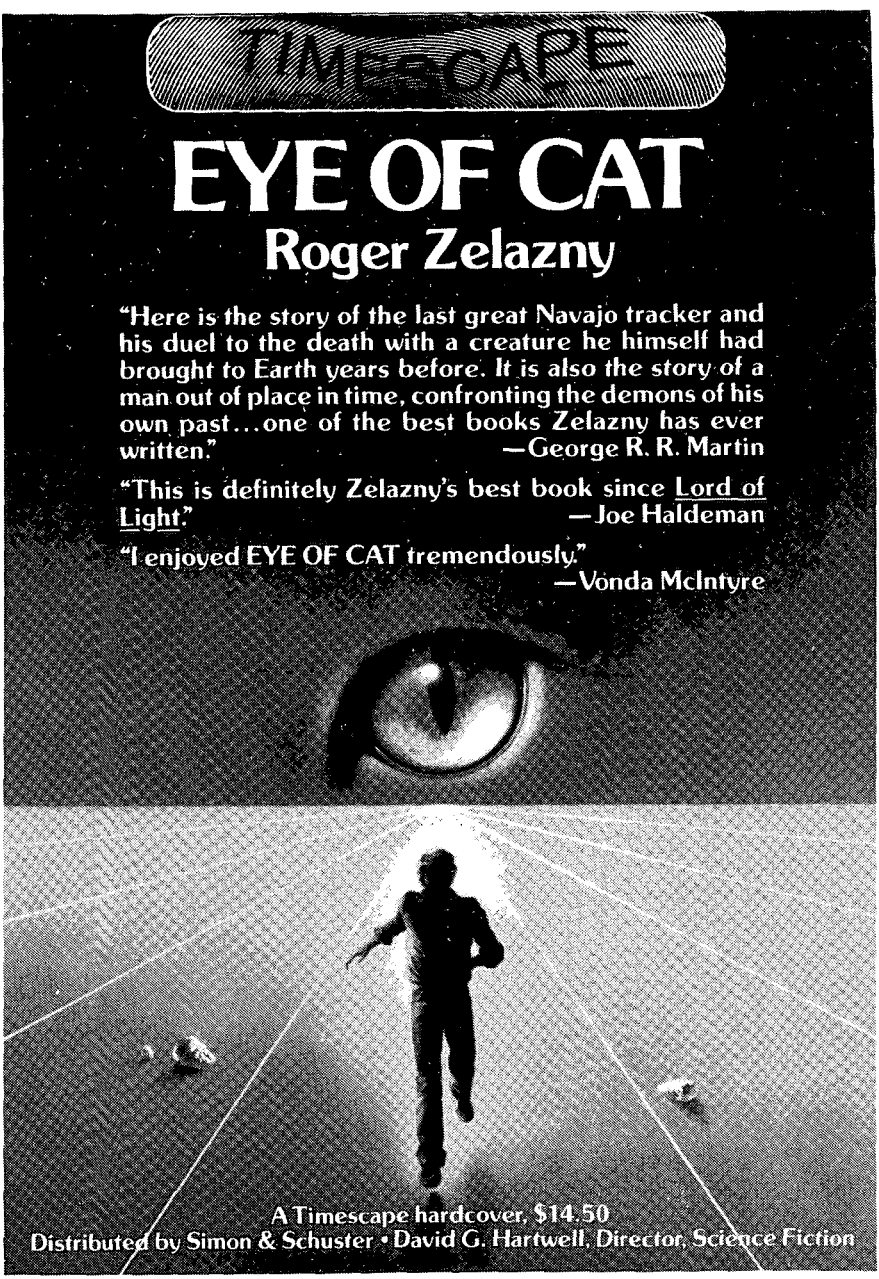

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Fantasy & Science Fiction

Including VENTURE SCIENCE FICTION

JANUARY • 34th Year of Publication

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Here is a new Tiptree story about the Quintana Roo, the wild eastern shore of the Yucatan Peninsula (including the island of Cozumel). According to the author, "a diary of life on its shores could often be taken for a log of life on an alien planet."

Beyond the Dead Reef

BY

JAMES TIPTREE, JR.

A love that is not sated
Calls from a poisoned bed;
Where monsters half-created
writhe, unliving and undead.
None knows for what they're fated;
None knows on what they've fed.

My informant was, of course, spectacularly unreliable.

The only character reference I have for him comes from the intangible nuances of a small restaurant-owner's remarks, and the only confirmation of his tale lies in the fact that an illiterate fishing-guide appears to believe it. If I were to recount all the reasons why no sane mind should take it seriously, we could never begin. So I will only report the fact that today I found myself shuddering with terror when a perfectly innocent sheet of seaworn plastic came slithering over my snorkelling-reef, as dozens have done for years — and get on with the story.

I met him one evening this December at the Cozumel *Buzo*, on my first annual supply trip. As usual, the *Buzo's* outer rooms were jammed with tourist divers and their retinues and gear. That's standard. *El Buzo* means, roughly, The Diving, and the *Buzo* is their place. Marcial's big sign in the win-

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dow reads "DIVVERS UELCOME! BRING YR FISH WE COK WITH CAR. FIRST DRINK FREE!"

Until he went in for the "Divvers", Marcial's had been a small quiet place where certain delicacies like stone-crab could be at least semi-legally obtained. Now he did a roaring trade in snappers and groupers cooked to order at outrageous fees, with a flourishing sideline in fresh fish sales to the neighborhood each morning.

The "roaring" was quite literal. I threaded my way through a crush of burly giants and giantesses of all degrees of nakedness, hairiness, age, proficiency, and inebriation — all eager to share their experiences and plans in voices powered by scuba-deafened ears and Marcial's free drink, beneath which the sound-system could scarcely be heard at full blast. (Marcial's only real expense lay in first-drink liquor so strong that few could recall whether what they ultimately ate bore any resemblence to what they had given him to cook.) Only a handful were sitting down yet and the amount of gear underfoot and on the walls would have stocked three sports shops. This was not mere exhibitionism; on an island chronically short of washers, valves and other spare parts the diver who lets his gear out of his sight is apt to find it missing in some vital.

I paused to allow a young lady to complete her massage of the neck of a youth across the aisle who was deep in talk with three others, and had time to notice the extraordinary number of heavy spear-guns racked about. Oklahomans, I judged, or perhaps South Florida. But then I caught clipped New England from the center group. Too bad; the killing mania seems to be spreading yearly, and the armament growing ever more menacing and efficient. When I inspected their platters, however, I saw the usual array of lavishly garnished lobsters and common fish. At least they had not yet discovered what to eat.

The mermaiden blocking me completed her task — unthanked — and I continued on my way in the little inner sanctum Marcial keeps for his old clientele. As the heavy doors cut off the uproar, I saw that this room was full too — three tables of dark-suited Mexican businessmen and a decorous family of eight, all quietly intent on their plates. A lone customer sat at the small table by the kitchen door, leaving an empty seat and a child's chair. He was a tall, slightly balding Anglo some years younger than I, in a very decent sports jacket. I recalled having seen him about now and then on my banking and shopping trips to the island.

Marcial telegraphed me a go-ahead nod as he passed through laden with more drinks, so I approached.

"Mind if I join you?"

He looked up from his stone-crab and gave me a slow, owlish smile.

"Welcome. A *diverse* welcome," he enunciated carefully. The accent was vaguely British, yet agreeable. I also

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perceived that he was extremely drunk, but in no common way.

"Thanks."

As I sat down I saw that he was a diver too, but his gear was stowed so unobtrusively I hadn't noticed it. I tried to stack my own modest snorkel outfit as neatly, pleased to note that, like me, he seemed to carry no spearguns. He watched me attentively, blinking once or twice, and then returned to an exquisitely exact dissection of his crab.

When Marcial brought my own platter of crab — unasked — we engaged in our ritual converse. Marcial's English is several orders of magnitude better than my Spanish, but he always does me the delicate courtesy of allowing me to use his tongue. How did I find my rented casita on the coco ranch this year? Fine. How goes the tourist business this year? Fine. I learn from Marcial: the slight pause before his answer with a certain tone, meant that in fact the tourist business was lousy so far, but would hopefully pick up; I used the same to convey that in fact my casa was in horrible shape but reparable. I tried to cheer him by saying that I thought the *Buzo* would do better than the general *tourismo*, because the diving enthusiasm was spreading in the States. "True," he conceded. "So long as they don't discover other places — like Belizé." Here he flicked a glance at my companion, who gave his solemn blink. I remarked that my country's politics were in disastrous disarray, and he conceded the same for his; the Presidente and his pals had just made off with much of the nation's treasury. And I expressed the hope that Mexico's new oil would soon prove a great boon. "Ah, but it will be a long time before it gets to the little people like us," said Marcial, with so much more than his normal acerbity that I refrained from my usual joke about his having a Swiss bank account. The uproar from the outer rooms had risen several decibels but just before Marcial had to leave he paused and said in a totally different voice, "My grandson Antonito Vincente has four teeth!"

His emotion was so profound that I seized his free hand and shook it lightly, congratulating him in English. And then he was gone, taking on his "Mexican waiter" persona quite visibly as he passed the inner doors.

As we resumed our attention to the succulence before us, my companion said in his low, careful voice, "Nice chap, Marcial. He likes you."

"It's mutual," I told him between delicate mouthfuls. Stone-crab is not to be gulped. "Perhaps because I'm old enough to respect the limits where friendship ends and the necessities of life take over."

"I say, that's rather good," my companion chuckled, "Respect for the limits where friendship ends and the necessities of life take over, eh? Very few Yanks do, you know. At least the ones we see down here."

His speech was almost unslurred,

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and there were no drinks before him on the table. We chatted idly a bit more. It was becoming apparent that we would finish simultaneously and be faced with the prospect of leaving together, which could be awkward, if he, like me, had no definite plans for the evening.

The dilemma was solved when my companion excused himself momentarily just as Marcial happened by.

I nodded to his empty chair. "Is he one of your old customers, Senor Marcial?"

As always Marcial understood the situation at once. "One of the oldest," he told me, and added low-voiced, "muy bueno gentes — a really good guy. Un poco de difficultates—" he made an almost imperceptible gesture of drinking — "But controllado. And he has also négocios — I do not know all, but some are important for his country. —So you really like the crab?" he concluded in his normal voice. "We are honoured."

My companion was emerging from the rather dubious regions that held the excusado.

Marcial's recommendation was good enough for me. Only one puzzle remained: what was his country? As we both refused dulce and coffee, I suggested that he might care to stroll down to the Marina with me and watch the sunset.

"Good thought."

We paid up Marcial's outrageous bills, and made our way through the exterior Bedlam, carrying our gear. One of the customers was brandishing his spear-gun as he protested his bill. Marcial seemed to have lost all his English except the words "Police", and cooler heads were attempting to calm the irate one. "All in a night's work," my companion commented as we emerged into a blaze of golden light.

The marina to our left was a simple L-shaped *muelle*, or pier, still used by everything from dinghies to commercial fisherman and baby yachts. It will be a pity when and if the town decides to separate the sports tourist trade from the more interesting working craft. As we walked out toward the pier in the last spectacular color of the tropic sunset over the mainland, the rigging lights of a cruise ship standing out in the channel came on, a fairyland illusion over the all-too-dreary reality.

"They'll be dumping and cleaning out their used bunkers tonight," my companion said, slurring a trifle now. He had a congenial walking gait, long-strided but leisurely. I had the impression that his drunkeness had returned slightly; perhaps the fresh air. "Damn crime."

"I couldn't agree more," I told him. "I remember when we used to start snorkelling and scuba-diving right off the shore here — you could almost wade out to untouched reefs. And now—"

There was no need to look; one

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could smell it. The effluvia of half a dozen hotels and the town behind ran out of pipes that were barely covered at low tide; only a few parrot-fish, who can stand anything, remained by the hotel-side restaurants to feed on the crusts the tourists threw them from their tables. And only the very ignorant would try out — once — the dilapidated Sunfish and water-ski renters who plied the small stretches of beach between hotels.

We sat down on one of the near benches to watch a commercial trawler haul net. I had been for some time aware that my companion, while of largely British culture, was not completely Caucasian. There was a minute softness to the voice, a something not quite dusky about hair and fingernails — not so much as to be what in my youth was called "A touch of the tarbrush", but nothing that originated in Yorkshire, either. Nor was it the obvious Hispano-Indian. I recollected Marcial's earlier speech and enlightenment came.

"Would I be correct in taking Marcial's allusiona to mean that you are a British Honduran — forgive me, I mean a Belizéian, or Belizan?"

"Nothing to forgive, old chap. We haven't existed long enough to get our adjectives straight."

"May god send you do." I was referring to the hungry maws of Guatemala and Honduras, the little country's big neighbors, who had the worst of intentions toward her. "I happen to be quite a fan of your country. I had some small dealings there after independence which involved getting all my worldly goods out of your customs on a national holiday, and people couldn't have been finer to me."

"Ah yes. Belizé the blessed, where sixteen nationalities live in perfect racial harmony. The odd thing is, they do."

"I could see that. But I couldn't quite count all sixteen."

"My own grandmother was a Burmese — so called. I think it was the closest grandfather could come to Black. Although the mix *is* extraordinary."

"My factor there was a very dark Hindu with red hair and a Scottish accent, named Robinson. I had to hire him in seven minutes. He was a miracle of efficiency. I hope he's still going."

"Robinson ... Used to work for customs?"

"Why, yes, now you recall it."

"He's fine ... Of course, we felt it when the British left. Among other things, half the WCs in the hotels broke down the first month. But there are more important things in life than plumbing."

"That I believe ... But you know, I've never been sure how much help the British would have been to you. Two years before your independence I called the British Embassy with a question about your immigration laws, and believe it or not I couldn't find one soul who even knew there *was* a British

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Honduras, let alone that they owned it. One child finally denied it flatly and hung up. And this was their main embassy in Washington, D.C. I realized then that Britain was not only sick, but crazy."

"Actually denied our existence, eh?" My companion's voice held a depth and timbre of sadness such as I have heard only from victims of better-known world wrongs. Absently his hand went under his jacket, and he pulled out something gleaming.

"Forgive me." It was a silver flask, exquisitely plain. He uncapped and drank, a mere swallow, but, I suspected, something of no ordinary power. He licked his lips as he recapped it, and sat up straighter while he put it away.

"Shall we move along out to the point?"

"With pleasure."

We strolled on, passing a few late sports-boats disgorging hungry divers.

"I'm going to do some modest exploring tomorrow," I told him. "A guide named Jorge" — in Spanish it's pronounced Hor-hay — "Jorge Chuc is taking me out to the end of the North reef. He says there's a pretty little untouched spot there. I hope so. Today I went South, it was so badly shot over I almost wept. Cripples — and of course shark everywhere. Would you believe I found a big she-turtle, trying to live with a steel bolt through her neck? I managed to catch her, but all I could do for her was pull it out. I hope she makes it."

"Bad ... Turtles are tough, though. If it wasn't vital you may have saved her. But did you say that Jorge Chuc is taking you to the end of the North reef?"

"Yes, why. Isn't it any good?"

"Oh, there is one pretty spot. But there's some very bad stuff there too. If you don't mind my advice, don't go far from the boat. I mean, a couple of metres. And don't follow anything. And above all be very sure it *is* Jorge's boat."

His voice had become quite different, with almost military authority.

"A couple of metres!" I expostulated. "But—"

"I know, I know. What I don't know is why Chuc is taking you there at all." He thought for a moment. "You haven't by any chance offended him, have you? In any way?"

"Why no — we were out for a long go yesterday, and had a nice chat on the way back. Yes ... although he is a trifle changeable, isn't he? I put it down to fatigue, and gave him some extra dinero for being only one party."

My companion made a untranslatable sound, compounded of dubiety, speculation, possible enlightenment, and strong suspicion.

"Did he tell you the name of that part of the reef? Or that it's out of sight of land?"

"Yes, he said it was far out. And that part of it was so poor it's called dead."

"And you chatted — forgive me,

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but was your talk entirely in Spanish?"

I chuckled deprecatingly. "Well, yes — I know my Spanish is pretty horrible, but he seemed to get the drift."

"Did you mention his family?"

"Oh yes — I could draw you the whole Chuc family tree."

"H'mmm...." My companion's eyes had been searching the pier-side where the incoming boats were being secured for the night."

"Ah. There's Chuc now. This is none of my business, you understand — but do I have your permission for a short word with Jorge?"

"Why yes. If you think it necessary."

"I do, my friend. I most certainly do."

"Carry on."

His long-legged stride had already carried him to Chuc's big skiff, the *Estrellita*. Chuc was covering his motors. I had raised my hand in greeting, but he was apparently too busy to respond. Now he greeted my companion briefly, but did not turn when he clambered into the boat uninvited. I could not hear the interchange. But presently the two men were standing, faces somewhat averted from each other as they conversed. My companion made rather a long speech, ending with questions. There was little response from Chuc, until a sudden outburst from him took me by surprise. The odd dialog went on for some time after that; Chuc seemed to calm down. Then the tall Belizian waved me over.

"Will you say exactly what I tell you to say!"

"Why, yes, if you think it's important."

"It is. Can you say in Spanish, 'I ask your pardon, Mr. Chuc. I mistook myself in your language. I did not say anything of what you thought I said. Please forgive my error. And please let us be friends again.' "

"I'll try."

I stumbled through the speech, which I will not try to reproduce here, as I repeated several phrases with what I thought was better accent, and I'm sure I threw several verbs into the conditional future. Before I was through, Chuc was beginning to grin. When I came to the "friends" part he had relaxed, and after a short pause, said in very tolerable English, "I see, so I accept your apology. We will indeed be friends. It was a regretable error ... And I advise you, do not again speak in Spanish."

We shook on it.

"Good," said my companion. "And he'll take you out tomorrow, but not to the dead reef. And keep your hands off your wallet tonight, but I suggest liberality tomorrow eve."

We left Chuc to finish up, and paced down to a bench at the very end of the *muelle*. The last colors of evening, peaches and rose shot with unearthly green, were set off by a few low-lying clouds already in grey shadow, like sharks of the sky passing beneath a

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sentimental vision of bliss.

"Now what was all *that* about!" I demanded of my new friend. He was just tucking the flask away again, and shuddered lightly.

"I don't wish to seem overbearing but *that* probably saved your harmless life, my friend. I repeat Jorge's advice — stay away from that Spanish of yours unless you are absolutely sure of being understood."

"I know it's ghastly."

"That's not actually the problem. The problem is that it isn't ghastly enough. Your pronunciation is quite fair, and you've mastered some good idioms, so people who don't know you think you speak much more fluently than you do. In this case the trouble came from your damned rolled rrrs. Would you mind saying the words for 'but' and 'dog'?"

"*Pero ...perro.* Why?"

"The difference between a rolled and a single r, particularly in Maya Spanish, is very slight. The upshot of it was that you not only insulted his boat in various ways, but you ended by referring to his mother as a dog ... He was going to take you out beyond the Dead Reef and leave you there."

"*What?*"

"Yes. And if it hadn't been I who asked — he knows I know the story — you'd never have understood a thing. Until you turned up as a statistic."

"Oh Jesus Christ...."

"Yes," he said dryly.

"I guess some thanks are in order," I said finally. "But words seem a shade inadequate. Have you any suggestions?"

My companion suddenly turned and gave me a highly concentrated look.

"You were in World War Two, weren't you? And afterwards you worked around a bit." He wasn't asking me, so I kept quiet. "Right now, I don't see anything," he went on. "But just possibly I might be calling on you," he grinned, "with something you may not like."

"If it's anything I can do from a wheelchair, I won't forget."

"Fair enough. We'll say no more about it now."

"Oh yes we will," I countered. "You may not know it, but you owe *me* something. I can smell a story when one smacks me in the face. What I want from you is the story behind this Dead Reef business, and how it is that Jorge knows you know something special about it. If I'm not asking too much? I'd really like to end our evening with your tale of the Dead Reef."

"Oho. My error — I'd forgotten Marcial telling me you wrote ... Well, I can't say I enjoy reliving it, but maybe it'll have a salutary effect on your future dealings in Spanish. The fact is, I was the one it happened to, and Jorge was driving a certain boat. You realize, though, there's not a shred of proof except my own word? And my own word—" he tapped the pocket holding his flask "—is only as good as you

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happen to think it is."

"It's good enough for me."

"Very well then. Very well," he said slowly, leaning back. "It happened about three, no four years back — by god, you know this is hard to tell, though there's not much to it." He fished in another pocket, and took out, not a flask, but the first cigaret I'd seen him smoke, a *Petit Caporal*. "I was still up to a long day's scuba then, and, like you, I wanted to explore North. I'd run into this nice, strong, young couple who wanted the same thing. Their gear was good, they seemed experienced and sensible. So we got a third tank apiece, and hired a trustable boatman — not Jorge, Victor Camul — to take us north over the worst of the reef. It wasn't so bad then, you know.

"We would be swimming North with the current until a certain point, where if you turn East, you run into a long reverse eddy that makes it a lot easier to swim back to Cozumel. And just to be extra safe, Victor was to start out up the eddy in two hours sharp to meet us and bring us home. I hadn't one qualm about the arrangements. Even the weather cooperated — not a cloud, and the forecast perfect. Of course, if you miss up around here, the next stop is four hundred miles to Cuba, but you know that; one gets used to it ... By the way, have you heard they're still looking for that girl who's been gone two days on a Sunfish with no water?"

I said nothing.

"Sorry." He cleared his throat. "Well, Victor put us out well in sight of shore. We checked watches and compasses and lights. The plan was for the lad Harry to lead, Ann to follow, and me to bring up the rear. Harry had day-glo-red shorts you could see a mile, and Ann was white-skinned with long black hair and a brilliant neon-blue and orange bathing suit on her little rump — you could have seen her in a mine at midnight. Even I got some yellow water safety tape and tied it around my arse and tanks.

"The one thing we didn't have then was a radio. At the time they didn't seem worth the crazy cost, and were unreliable besides. I had no way of guessing I'd soon give my life for one — and very nearly did.

"Well, when Victor let us out and we got organized and started North single file over the dead part of the reef, we almost surfaced and yelled for him to take us back right then. It was purely awful. But we knew there was better stuff ahead, so we stuck it out and flippered doggedly along — actually doing pretty damn fair time, with the current — and trying not to look too closely at what lay below.

"Not only was the coral dead, you understand — that's where the name got started. We think now it's from oil and chemical wash, such as that pretty ship out there is about to contribute — but there was tons and tons of litter, *basura* of all description, crusted there. It's everywhere, of course — you've seen

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what washes onto the mainland beach — but here the current and the reef produce a particularly visible concentration. Even quite large heavy things — bedsprings, auto chasses — in addition to things you'd expect, like wrecked skiffs. Cozumel, *Basurera del Caribe!*"

He gave a short laugh, mocking the Gem-of-the-Caribbean ads, as he lit up another Caporal. The most polite translation of basurera is garbage can.

"A great deal of the older stuff was covered with that evil killer algae — you know, the big coarse red-brown hairy kind, which means that nothing else can ever grow there again. But some of the heaps were too new.

"I ended by getting fascinated and swimming lower to look, always keeping one eye on that blue-and-orange rump above me with her white legs and black flippers. And the stuff — I don't mean just Chlorox and *detergente* bottles, beer cans and netting — but weird things like about ten square metres of butchered pink plastic baby-dolls — arms and legs wiggling, and rose bud mouths — it looked like a babies' slaughter-house. Syringes, hypos galore. Fluorescent tubes on end, waving like drowned orchestra conductors. A great big red sofa with a skeletonized banana-stem or *something* sitting in it — when I saw that, I went back up and followed right behind Ann.

"And then the sun dimmed unexpectedly, so I surfaced for a look. The shoreline was fine, we had plenty of time, and the cloud was just one of a dozen little thermals that form on a hot afternoon like this. When I went back down Ann was looking at me, so I gave her the All's fair sign. And with that we swam over a pair of broken dories and found ourselves in a different world — the beauty patch we'd been looking for.

"The reef was live here — whatever had killed the coral hadn't reached yet, and the damned basura had quit or been deflected, aside from a beer bottle or two. There was life everywhere; anemones, sponges, conches, fans, stars — and fish, oh my! No one ever came here, you see. In fact, there didn't seem to have been any spearing, the fish were as tame as they used to be years back.

"Well, we began zigzagging back and forth, just revelling in it. And every time we'd meet head on we'd make the gesture of putting our fingers to our lips, meaning Don't tell anyone about this, ever!

"The formation of the reef was charming, too. It broadened into a sort of big stadium, with allées and cliffs and secret pockets, and there were at least eight different kinds of coral. And most of it was shallow enough so the sunlight brought out the glorious colors — those little black and yellow fish — butterflies, or I forget their proper name — were dazzling. I kept having to brush them off my mask, they wanted to look in.

"The two ahead seemed to be in ec-

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stasies; I expect they hadn't seen much like this before. They swam on and on, investigating it all — and I soon realized there was real danger of losing them in some coral pass. So I stuck tight to Ann. But time was passing. Presently I surfaced again to investigate — and, my god, the shoreline was damn near invisible and the line-up we had selected for our turn marker was all but passed! Moreover, a faint hazy overcast was rising from the West.

"So I cut down again, intending to grab Ann and start, which Harry would have to see. So I set off after the girl. I used to be a fair sprint-swimmer, but I was amazed how long it took me to catch her. I recall vaguely noticing that the reef was going a bit bad again, dead coral here and there. Finally I came right over her, signed to her to halt, and kicked up in front of her nose for another look.

"To my horror, the shoreline was gone and the overcast had overtaken the sun. We would have to swim East by compass, and swim hard. I took a moment to hitch my compass around where I could see it well — it was the old-fashioned kind — and then I went back down for Ann. And the damn fool girl wasn't there. It took me a minute to locate that blue bottom and white legs; I assumed she'd gone after Harry, having clearly no idea of the urgency of our predicament.

"I confess the thought crossed my mind that I could cut out of there, and come back for them later with Victor, but this was playing a rather iffy game with someone else's lives. And if they were truly unaware, it would be fairly rotten to take off without even warning them. So I went after Ann again — my god, I can still see that blue tail and the white limbs and black feet and hair with the light getting worse every minute and the bottom now gone really rotten again. And as bad luck would have it she was going in just the worst line — north-north-west.

"Well I swam and I swam and I *swam*. You know how a chase takes you, and somehow being unable to overtake a mere girl made it worse. But I was gaining, age and all, until just as I got close enough to sense something was wrong, she turned sidewise above two automobile tyres — and I saw it wasn't a girl at all.

"I had been following a god-damned great fish — a fish with a bright blue and orange band around its belly, and a thin white body ending in a black, flipperlike tail. Even its head and nape were black, like her hair and mask. It had a repulsive catfish-like mouth, with barbels.

"The thing goggled at me, and then swam awkwardly away, just as the light went worse yet. But there was enough for me to see that it was no normal fish, either, but a queer archaic thing that looked more tacked together than grown. This I can't swear to, because I was looking elsewhere by then, but it was my strong impression that as it went out of my line of sight its whole tail broke off.

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"But, as I say, I was looking elsewhere. I had turned my light on, although I was not deep but only dim, because I had to read my watch and compass. It had just dawned on me that I was very probably a dead man. My only chance, if you can call it that, was to swim East as long as I could, hoping for that eddy and Victor. And when my light came on, the first thing I saw was the girl, stark naked and obviously stone cold dead, lying in a tangle of nets and horrid stuff on the bottom ahead.

"Of Harry or anything human there was no sign at all. But there was a kind of shining, like a pool of moonlight, around her, which was so much stronger than my lamp that I clicked it off and swam slowly toward her, through the nastiest mess of *basura* I had yet seen. The very water seemed vile. It took longer to reach her than I had expected, and soon I saw why.

"They speak of one's blood running cold with horror, y'know. Or people becoming numb with horror piled on horrors. I believe I experienced both those effects. It isn't pleasant, even now." He lit a third Caporal, and I could see that the smoke column trembled. Twilight had fallen while he'd been speaking. A lone mercury lamp came on at the shore end of the pier; the one near us was apparantly out, but we sat in what would ordinarily have been a pleasant tropic evening, sparkling with many moving lights — whites, reds and green, of late-moving incomers and the rainbow lighting from the jewel-lit cruise ship ahead, all cheerfully reflected in the unusually calm waters.

"Again I was mistaken, you see. It wasn't Ann at all; but the rather more distant figure of a young woman, of truly enormous size. All in this great ridge of graveyard luminosity, of garbage in phosphorescent decay. The current was carrying me slowly, inexorably, right toward her — as it had carried all that was there now. And perhaps I was also a bit hypnotized. She grew in my sight metre by metre as I neared her. I think six metres — eighteen feet — was about it, at the end ... I make that guess later, you understand, as an exercise in containing the unbearable — by recalling the size of known items in the junkpile she lay on. One knee, for example, lay alongside an oil drum. At the time she simply filled my world. I had no doubt she was dead, and very beautiful. One of her legs seemed to writhe gently.

"The next stage of horror came when I realized that she was not a gigantic woman at all — or rather, like the fish, she was a woman-shaped construction. The realization came to me first, I think, when I could no longer fail to recognize that her "breasts" were two of those great net buoys with the blue knobs for nipples.

"After that it all came with a rush — that she was a made-up body — all sorts of pieces of plastic, rope, styrofoam, netting, crates and bolts —

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much of it clothed with that torn translucent white polyethylene for skin. Her hair was a dreadful tangle of something, and her crotch was explicit and unspeakable. One hand was a torn, inflated rubber glove, and her face — well, I won't go into it except that one eye was a traffic reflector and her mouth was partly a rusted can.

"Now you might think this discovery would have brought some relief, but quite the opposite. Because simultaneously I had realized the very worst thing of all—

"She was alive."

He took a long drag on his cigaret.

"You know how things are moved passively in water? Plants waving, a board seesawing and so on? Sometimes enough almost to give an illusion of mobile life. What I saw was nothing of this sort.

"It wasn't merely that as I floated over her horrible eyes "opened" and looked at me, and her rusted-can mouth *smiled.* Oh, no.

"What I mean is that as she smiled, first one whole arm, shedding junk, stretched up and reached for me *against the current,* and then the other did the same.

"And when I proved to be out of reach, this terrifying figure, or creature, or unliving life, actually sat up, again *against the current,* and reached up toward me with both arms at full extension.

"And as she did so, one of her 'breasts' — the right one — came loose and dangled by some sort of tenuous thready stuff.

"All this seemed to pass in slow motion — I even had time to see that there were other unalive yet living things moving near her on the pile. Not fish, but more what I should have taken, on land, for rats or vermin — and I distinctly recall the paper-flat skeleton of something like a chicken, running and pecking. And other moving things like nothing in this world. I have remembered all this very carefully, y'see, from what must have been quick glimpses, because in actual fact I was apparently kicking like mad in a frenzied effort to get away from those dreadul, reaching arms.

"It was not til I shot to the surface with a mighty splash that I came somewhere near my senses. Below and behind me I could still see faint cold light. Above was twilight and the darkness of an oncoming small storm.

"At that moment the air in my last tank gave out — or rather that splendid Yank warning buzz, which means you have just time to get out of your harness, sounded off.

"I had, thank god, practiced the drill. Despite being a terror-paralysed madman, habit got me out of the harness before the tanks turned into lethal deadweight. In my panic of course, the headlight went down too. I was left unencumbered in the night, free to swim toward Cuba, or Cozumel, and to drown as slow or fast as fate willed.

"The little storm had left the hori-

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zon stars free. I recall that pure habit made me take a sight on what seemed to be Canopus, which should be over Cozumel. I began to swim in that direction. I was appallingly tired, and as the adrenalin of terror which had brought me this far began to fade out of my system, I realized I could soon be merely drifting, and would surely die in the next day's sun if I survived til then. Nevertheless it seemed best to swim whilst I could.

"I rather resented it when some time after a boat motor passed nearby. It forced me to attempt to yell and wave, nearly sinking myself. I was perfectly content when the boat passed on. But someone had seen — a spotlight wheeled blindingly, motors reversed, I was forcibly pulled from my grave and voices from what I take to be your Texas demanded, roaring with laughter," — here he gave quite a creditable imitation — " 'Whacha doin out hyar, boy, this time of night? Ain't no pussy out hyar, less'n ya'all got a date with a mermaid.' They had been trolling for god knows what, mostly beer.

"The driver of that boat claimed me as a friend and later took me home for the night, where I told to him — and to him alone — the whole story. He was Jorge Chuc.

"Next day I found that the young couple, Harry and Ann, had taken only a brief look at the charming unspoiled area, and then started East, exactly according to plan, with me — or something very much like me — following behind them all the way. They had been a trifle surprised at my passivity and uncommunicativeness, and more so when, on meeting Victor, I was no longer to be found. But they had taken immediate action, even set a full scale search in progress — approximately seventy kilometers from where I then was. As soon as I came to myself I had to concoct a wild series of lies about cramps and heart trouble to get them in the clear and set their minds at ease. Needless to say, my version included no mention of diver-imitating fish-life."

He tossed the spark of his cigaret over the rail before us.

"So now, my friend, you know the whole story of all I know of what is to be found beyond the Dead Reef. It may be that others know of other happenings and developments there. Or of similar traps elsewhere. The sea is large ... Or it may be that the whole yarn comes from neuroses long abused by stuff like this."

I had not seen him extract his flask, but he now took two deep, shuddering swallows.

I sighed involuntarily, and then sighed again. I seemed to have been breathing rather inadequately during the end of his account.

"Ordinary thanks don't seem quite appropriate here," I finally said. "Though I do thank you. Instead I am going to make two guesses. The second is that you might prefer to sit quietly

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here alone, enjoying the evening, and defer the mild entertainment I was about to offer you to some other time. I'd be glad to be proved wrong...?"

"No. You're very perceptive, I welcome the diverse — the deferred offer." His tongue stumbled a bit now more from fatigue than anything he'd drunk. "But what was your first guess?"

I rose and slowly paced a few metres to and fro, remembering to pick up my absurd snorkel bag. Then I turned and gazed out to the sea.

"I can't put it into words. It has something to do with the idea that the sea is still, well, strong. Perhaps it can take revenge? No, that's too simple. I don't know. I have only a feeling that our ordinary ideas of what may be coming on us may be — oh — not deep, or broad enough. I put this poorly. But perhaps the sea, or nature, will not die passively at our hands, ...perhaps death itself may turn or return in horrible life upon us, besides the more mechanical dooms...."

"Our thoughts are not so far apart," the tall Belézan said. "I welcome them to my night's agenda."

"To which I now leave you, unless you've changed your mind?"

He shook his head. I hoisted his bag to the seat beside him. "Don't forget this. I almost left mine."

"Thanks. And don't you forget about dogs and mothers," he grinned faintly.

"Goodnight."

My footsteps echoed on the now deserted *muelle* left him sitting there. I was quite sure he was no longer smiling.

Nor was I.

"What *traffic was unusually heavy?*"

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Books

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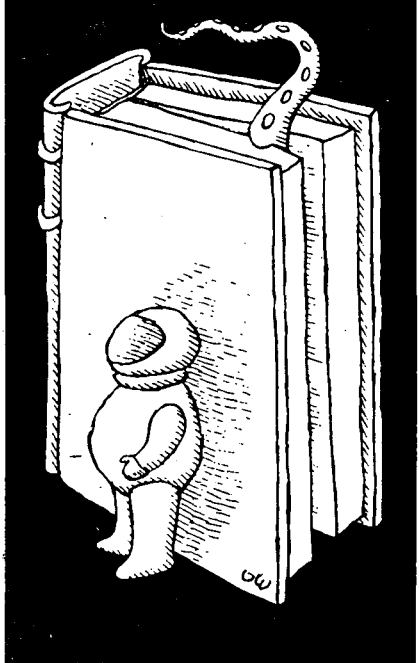

Drawing by Gahan Wilson

Bridges to Fantasy, Slusser, Rabkin & Scholes, eds. Southern Illinois University Press, $18.95

As you may know, there is an academic body called the Science Fiction Research Association. It's a species of miniaturized Modern Language Association. The SFRA is big stuff academically, within its universe, just as the MLA is rife with prestige. Its meetings and publications generate large numbers of scholarly papers on various aspects of speculative fiction, and thus support a number of academic careers at a wide variety of colleges and universities.

Nor is the SFRA alone in offering a route to academic publications on SF, nor is that the only means of holding on to an SF-related career in academe. Academe in turn is funded rather more by grants and endowments than it is by tuition fees; much postgraduate research is done on one form or another of public money. What does the public — in this case, the SF-reading public — get for this?

Practically nothing. The formal scholarship of speculative fiction is, taken in the whole, worthless.

On reconsideration, that's too strong a statement. The scholarship of speculative fiction is of some value to speculative fiction scholars because it allows them to take in each other's washing; in all other respects it is, taken in the whole, utterly worthless.

Speaking as someone who pays fed-

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eral and state income taxes, a broad variety of other taxes which funnel some portion into academe, and ponies up for college tuitions besides, I feel entitled to question this situation. Perhaps you feel with me that questions ought to be asked.

The first one, of course, would be whether my assertion about the value of SF research is at all true.

If it's not, I at least have company. A number of scholars knowledgeable in SF have raised the point before me. A striking example is a 1978 essay by Lloyd Biggle, Jr., writing a "State of the Art" piece for *Analog*. Biggle is, of course, the SF writer of long standing, appreciable success, and even more appreciable accomplishment. He is also a highly respected academic. In his essay — which goes on to acutely cite chapter and verse on specific academic papers full of open error and contorted logic — he points out that collections of such papers often fail a common test. Open any such collection, turn to an essay addressing some topic in which you also have some expertise, and begin reading at random. If this process repeatedly turns up obvious instances of sloppy or prejudged research into facts, you can presume the same level of scholarship in the work on other topics. By extension, when nearly every such compendium yields this sort of result, the entire research establishment is highly suspect.

How many exceptions are there? Well, there are entire classes of research which by their nature have to stand up to real tests, and thus tend to be self-weeding with respect to error. Anything on the teaching of SF writing, for instance, is either going to be effective or is going to prove to be harmless nonsense. In any case, at least ninety percent of teaching is the relationship a specific teacher establishes with specific students. What facts or factoids they discuss are far less important than the attitude they bring to the discussion and evolve between them. It's not really possible for even bad teaching to crush a born writer, and meanwhile the student is at least meeting other would-be writers and comparing experiences. Some potentially marginal writers are probably discreated by bad teaching. But I see that as a plus for SF readers — it makes up for the marginal talents that are boosted into publication by good teaching.

And there are specific academics who actually were SF readers all along, just like normal F&SF readers, and actually have a pretty good idea of what's been happening in the actual field. Gary K. Wolfe (not the fellow who wrote *Killerbowl*) comes to mind, as do Beverly Friend and Betty Ann Hull.* Leonard Isaacs, Glenn Wright, and in fact all the academics at Michigan State who have served as faculty advisors to Clarion SF writing workshops also fall into this category. They

**I cannot name people I haven't met and discussed SF with.*

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do so not only on their native merit but as a consequence of the fact that they are among the few academics who have a clear idea of where it all comes from.

Then there are the people like Biggle, who can both do it and teach it; there are half a dozen of those with strong academic credentials. Add Martin Harry Greenberg — an academic of political science, but an outstanding scholar and editor in SF and of SF — and you have drawn a circle around almost all the scholars with whose conclusions and assertions one might argue from time to time, but who will have their facts straight and their feet on the ground.

After that, if you want to know how the literature works and how it developed, you're best off going to the commercial essayists like Damon Knight, Brian Aldiss, and the other compilers of trade books on SF. Taken as a whole, they are a spotty, sometimes outright prevaricating gaggle of sources, but on their worst days and in their worst instance they are better than the "trained" researchers as a class.

The academics do range farther, tracing the faintest evolutions of the most slender sub-thematic threads, finding — and, more important, naming — the equivalents of phlogiston, aether, and humors far more often than they touch on anything that exists in nature. But unlike their analogues in the history of science, who eventually began getting things straight, the academics of SF literature are trapped in the endless cycles of pre-Baconian times, when philosophers debated endlessly on Aristotle, generated vast nomenclatures, and kept the world dark by never, never actually going to look again at what (it is said) Aristotle had looked at fifteen hundred years previously. There may be truth in there somewhere — God knows, *everything* is in there somewhere — but you cannot tell it from the other stuff.

I frankly welcome the shakeout in academe that is killing off fringe courses as the grant money dwindles. A lot of them were boondoggled into existence by people whose actual education and capacity for rigor would disqualify them from posting the menu at a truck stop.* Many of them display an awareness of SF limited to a few readings of other people's papers on *The Martian Chronicles, A Canticle for Leibowitz, Nineteen Eighty-Four,* and three or four LeGuin novels. At Wayne State University, I ran across an instructor who was teaching *The War of the Worlds* from an idea that H.G. Wells was Orson Welles's father; this explained for him many otherwise puzzling aspects of the relationship between the novel and the radio play which he further believed Welles

That's on the average, of course. Academe being what it is, one major institution has killed an excellent SF course because it was too popular, and is punishing most of the people associated with a science fiction issue of its literary magazine.

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wrote. While this is a memorable howler, my experiences as a visiting lecturer at various universities include quite a few discoveries of this sort, and the number and frequency of such occurrences lead me to believe even more strongly that SF academe in general fails the Biggle test.

By that same test, as applied by me, not Biggle, the SF academic generally came to the field not as an SF reader but as an academic with some other initial interest that circumstances did not allow him or her to pursue. Typically, this person is associated with SF at all only because it was possible to make a niche in the faculty by executing that maneuver.

Most SF-related courses exist because at one time — about ten or fifteen years ago — they were perceived as glamorous adjuncts to the curriculum, attractive to students and some grantors anxious to partake of with-itness.

Most SF "instructors" and hence most SFRA members got those jobs because their supporters — the department chairmen and the deans — were even less qualified to appraise their actual expertise than the instructors were to teach.

These are, in other words, by and large people who have failed at their first proposed specialty either because they hadn't educated themselves as thoroughly as the rivals who got the jobs they initially wanted, or because they're inherently not as educable and as capable of academic rigor.*

We are speaking now of the majority of SF literature courses and the majority of academic publications on SF literature; probably, the overwhelming majority, although, thank you, Reaganomics, the proportion of dross to something that will pass for gold is shrinking. (Of course, there's a general shrinkage, too.)

Why should we care? Well, for one thing, some number of F&SF readers are contemplating taking SF lit courses. I suggest you investigate the instructor's credentials thoroughly, setting aside the credits based on academic publication since there's no way to tell whether the work was good or bad as distinguished from bulky. There's no point taking a class you'd be better qualified to teach; it leads only to infighting with the panicked instructor.

For another thing, since most SF writers since 1950 have been coming up through college courses in literature and writing, and since extensive curricula specifically in SF literature and writing have existed since about 1965, all this has had an effect on the fiction offered to you. This will not make a difference if your own tastes in SF were formed since then — if you're 25 or

The exceptions know who they are, and won't join the howl of protest that will now arise. Most of them will agree, some of them having already shown me what I have in effect repeated here.

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younger, say — nor do I know what you can do about it if you find SF increasingly not like what you originally came to want. But at least you will have a better understanding of your tastes and of the likelihood that the glorified new work by the sensational new writer will in fact deliver anything sensational to you.

Why do I care? Well, of course, there's the fact that to me it seems crystal clear that the milieu of 20th century publishing — mass saturation publishing — has acted on literature in a manner without precedent in human history, and in itself thus constitutes a unique event in the arts. Furthermore, it seems equally clear to me that speculative fiction, by being forced into pseudogeneric containers labelled "science fiction" and "newstand fantasy," has been uniquely affected within that unique event.

It seems to me that if there is scholarship at all, this is a signal opportunity for scholarship. But scholarship conditioned by the ideal that human thought is precious above all things because it is the only unique aspect of life for the human animal, and scholarship further informed by the ideal that clear communication of clear thought is the most noble human enterprise.

Otherwise — since scholars by their nature build on earlier scholarly utterances, mastering a vocabulary of jargon and conventions so complex that they literally cannot go back to primary sources and return with communicable fresh insights in one lifespan — what will be perpetuated is elaborate error and institutionalized sloth. It seems clear to me that an opportunity of this magnitude calls for the very best minds available in the domain of literary studies. And what we have gotten instead, by and large, are the cripples.

Jargon — what outsiders call "jargon" rather than "a specialized vocabulary analogous to the special vocabularies of all specialties" — stands as the single most imposing barrier between the academic paper and the lay reader. It is a jolt to pick up a book like *Bridges to Fantasy* and find an introductory paragraph like:

> One of the most significant aspects of modern culture is the resurgence of interest in fantasy on all levels — as element of human thought, as constant factor in man's social and intellectual environment, as generator of form in art and literature.

It took three professors to forego the use of the definite and indefinite article in English prose. The Introduction is by George E. Slusser, Eric S. Rabkin and Robert Scholes, than which SF academe offers no heavier hitters. But this is an instance when academe's predilection for prose mannerism at least fails to conceal a clear statement.*

**It does slip in a pre-judgment about "the resurgence"; this turns out to be a central statement of constraints placed on the range of the book.*

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What however do you make of this?:

> I am moved by Eric Rabkin's insight when, in his recent anthology of fantasy, he places *A Voyage to Arcturus* together with *Alice in Wonderland* in his range (10) category of fantasy, meaning the outer limit of the mode, after which I suppose we would pass into a strange new Scripture, a revelation like that of the Gnostic Valentinus or of Joachim of Flora.

One academic, Harold Bloom, De Vane Professor of the Humanities of Yale, sufficed to create that paragraph in his paper "*Clinamen:* Towards a Theory of Fantasy." And it, too, I'm sure is a clear statement provided one has read Rabkin on — I presume — range categories of fantasy. (It's not strictly necessary to know who Valentinus and Joachim were; we can gather their general nature from the reference to Scripture.*) But it is not a statement directed at anyone outside a tight circle who all share the same vocabulary and the same library. And it argues by its nature that the bulk of this sort of scolarship must lie in reading not the actual literature but the literature on the literature, or the would-be scholar would soon lose his grip on the nomenclature.

The incestuous nature of SF scholarship — remarkable even by the standards of the SF-writing community — is pointed up by the circumstances under which *Bridges to Fantasy* appears. So is the irony inherent in the fact that truth and dross in this milieu are so inextricably mixed that truth is frequently forced to perpetuate dross.

The book is part of a general series, called Alternatives, published by that remarkable enterprise, Southern Illinois University Press, one of the very few healthy university presses remaining, and in my experience the most imaginative one. The general editors of Alternatives are Eric Rabkin, Martin Harry Greenberg, and Joseph Olander; the latter is of course frequently Greenberg's collaborator in many trade-press anthologies that represent not only good SF reading but works of genuine SF scholarship *in esse*.

Alternatives rarely gets into the rarefied. It publishes primary data: SF author biographies, single-author collections, facsimiles of issues of landmark magazines, and the like. (Under other programs, SIU Press also publishes an excellent series of famous screenplays, and other goodies; ask for their catalog.) The essential mission of the series is to select and preserve; its function is reportorial.

And as part of that function it brings us this book, edited by Slusser, Rabkin and Scholes. *Bridges to Fantasy*, complementing last year's *Bridges to Science Fiction*, is the anthology of the papers presented at the second

I do want to point out, however, that those of you who feel I sometimes get too gay with the dependent clauses can now sit down and subside; in the words of Robert Clive on trial for defalcation, when I contemplate the opportunities I marvel at my restraint.

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Eaton Conference on Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, February 23-24, 1980, held at the University of California, Riverside. (Slusser, in addition to being associated with the very spotty Borgo Press series of SF-author studies, is Curator of the Eaton Collection of Science Fiction and Fantastic Literature at Riverside.) The Eaton Conference is one of the major focii of SF scholarship. Thus, SIU Press serves its function in this case by bringing us primary data on an event dedicated wholly to the secondary and the tertiary.

The essayists here come from all over the country — nay, although this is just a guess, Bloom's use of "Towards" and some of his syntactical choices suggest long exposure to Britannic academe as well, while British-born David Ketterer, contributor of "Power Fantasy in the 'Science Fiction' of Mark Twain," is based at Concordia University in Montreal. Clearly, what walked into the Conference precincts was the scholarly equivalent of Murderers' Row, nor were their Louisville Sluggers kept silent by the sidearm offerings of an absent guest, Tzvetan Todorov, who plays the role of batting-practice pitcher.

There would be little point in attempting head-to-head criticisms of the content of these papers; for one thing, as with the Bloom, many of the statements are partially opaqued to me because they refer to other academic statements I have not pored over. For another, space here does not permit, and for a third you would have to have already obtained the book and studied its array of assertions.

I will point out to you that Ketterer is the man who found a great many parallels between *Rogue Moon*, a novel called *The Death Machine* by its author and set in a matter-duplicating facility on Earth, and *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, a novel about an anti-colonial revolution led by a computer personality on the Moon; I have always assumed two of Ketterer's 3x5 cards got stuck together. (And if you assume that the authors of books subject to academic scrutiny are *ever* contacted by the scrutinors, you are quite wrong.) In *Bridges to Fantasy*, too, George R. Guffey expresses his joy at discovering this new thing to play with:

> Those of us who come to fantasy and science fiction after years of studying the poetry and prose of the earliest periods of English and American history do so with considerable delight. We are delighted, first, because a substantial amount of the fantasy and science fiction published since 1950 is quality literature. We are delighted second, because of the rich research opportunities the field offers.

Guffey is a professor of English at UCLA. The title of his Eaton paper is "The Unconscious, Fantasy, and Science Fiction: Transformations in Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles* and Lem's *Solaris*," in which he asserts that the Bradbury is not scientific while the

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Lem is, a thesis to which I rise and cry "*Not Proven!*", having actually read both books. I think Bradbury is demonstrably just as careful with his science in *Chronicles* as Lem is in *Solaris*. But that is not germane to my line of argument here, which is that while Guffey may take it as a matter of course that 1950 represents some sort of break-point between substantial and less than substantial amounts of "quality" in SF, this construct is as naive as Guffey's "Wow, there must be a pony in here somewhere!" manner.

You realize, gentle reader, that Guffey has just written off the Golden Age and the Futurians at the very least; that is, no pun intended, Isaac, he has SF — both science fiction and newsstand fantasy — floating some perceptible distance above its foundations. He can't even read the dates on a copyright page, or he would know that the stories from which *Chronicles* was cobbled-together were from the 1940s, and received enthusiastically by the regular readers of *Planet Stories*. Nor does his thesis go on to display much awareness that these were originally quite distinct stories, some of them never intended in Bradbury's mind to be set on the same Mars,* and that the "novel" results at least in part from agent Don Congdon's salesmanly ability to wangle a book contract out of Doubleday, perhaps to Bradbury's surprise.

Guffey does not display any capacity or desire to see *Planet, Startling, Thrilling Wonder Stories, Astounding, Unknown, Weird Tales, Astonishing* and *Super Science* for what they were. He can only recognize the places — the few places, to his eyes — where they resemble the conceptions he learned while becoming to some extent an expert in seventeenth-century literature, and an asserted expert on science in literature. He will not investigate what was; he will make it resemble what he is confident of understanding, whether that confidence is borne out by objective judgments or no.

The thrust of this Eaton Conference was to move toward some sort of Theory of Fantasy, a movement continued as part of the "academic track" at the World SF Convention in 1982. But not in this book, at least, do I find any central understanding of the difference between classical fantasy and newsstand fantasy; I rarely find any attempt to come to even a conditional distinction between the two sub-categories, and most of the elaborated theses thus perforce pretend that it's all one thing. As anyone who has ever eaten a rare hamburger also containing some ground pork can tell you, this sort of carelessness in rigor can have profound effects, none of them desirable.

*Granted that in the 1940s "Mars" floated continually in Bradbury's mind as one icon — steamy, lush Venus was the other — to which he returned incessantly. But I see very little in Guffey about Mars as Lost Childhood in Early Bradbury and the Solaris station as Everted Womb in Lem, not that this sort of response represents my main line of critcism.

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As I look over these papers, all of them still in effect hung up on the now very obsolete question of whether science fiction is a branch of fantasy and still grappling with how "fantasy" relates to "literature," what I see is a bunch of people hanging on the tusks, ears, trunk, legs, tail and perhaps other parts of speculative fiction.

But one thing they do very well here. Let us get back to Tzvetan Todorov, a name to conjure with.

Todorov, about whom I know nothing else, is the author of *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, in which he offered the no doubt elaborately supported proposition that the literature of the fantastic no longer exists. Eric S. Rabkin, however, professor of English at the University of Michigan and Associate Dean for Long-Range Planning, has repeatedly found that the literature of the fantastic is blossoming, has he not, and Scholes and Slusser with him. Rabkin, apart from being one of the editors of this volume, was going to be a major presence at the Conference, each of these essayists knew. By some coincidence, in this book you will see Todorov repeatedly losing out in direct comparison not so much to Rabkin's thesis as to declarations that the discussants have a greater emotional affinity for Rabkin's thesis.

This series of long flies over Todorov's head may represent a laudable pragmatism. He sounds, sight unseen, like someone whose earnest intellection had driven him far out on an imaginary — not to say fantastical — limb. But, playing for the moment by rules of elephant baseball in the treetops, sight unseen I have to wonder.

Isn't it at least conditionally defensible to assert, for instance, that in a world which is itself increasingly phantasmagorical all art reflects fantasy, and any distinction between fantastic literature and a literature of fantasy becomes too tenuous for even a scholar to find? Would that not account for both the "disappearance" of a distinguishable literature of the fantastic and for a booming interest in fantasy? And is that not a bridge between Todorov and Rabkin, at least?

I find it odd that no one in this book has at any discernible point come to this elementary thought, which is well within the capabilities and logical rigors demonstrated by the discussants, and would, by the normal standards of scholarship as assertedly espoused, have represented fruitful grounds for an advance into better understanding — as scholarship understands understanding. What we seem to have instead is a species of gleeful mugging.

In other words, while I'm sure *Bridges to Fantasy* reports on scholarship done to the highest standards of rigor and objectivity, I wonder how all this would have gone if Todorov, not Rabkin, had been as variously associated with the Eaton Conference.

Tsk, tsk. Or perhaps kiss, kiss.

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This story — about a young scientist and her remarkable relationship with a man who has just woken from a century of frozen sleep — is a first sale for Linda Blanchard, who writes that she is a resident of Washington state, where she runs a local chapter of a pro-space group and works as a telecommunications operator.

Mirror of the Soul

BY

L. S. BLANCHARD

Glacia wrapped her hands around the mug of coffee, absorbing its warmth as she watched the steam rising. She tried to close her mind to the conversations in the cafeteria around her but words kept invading her thoughts. *Frozen,* she heard them say. She shivered. *For almost a hundred years.* Her hands tightened, trying to steal the heat right out of the coffee. Focus on heat, she thought, focus on sunshine.

She looked up with a start as Fran slid his lunch tray onto the table and sat down. Her best friend, he didn't have to ask to join her, but at this moment, feeling tense and withdrawn — her bones aching with chronic cold — she resented his company. Her gaze passed through him, over his shoulder and out the window. Something, sparkling, drifted by. Several sparkles. Fran reached across the table and pressed his hands around hers, sandwiching hers between heat sources. She watched the drifting white sparkles a moment longer, finally registering what she was seeing.

Dammit. "Snow." The word was cold in her throat, came out cold. "April in San Francisco. It's not supposed to snow." Fran transferred soup, sandwich, tea from his tray to the table. "I'd heard there was going to be a cold snap. It won't last." He carried the tray away. "Anyway, it's not the snow that's bothering you, is it, Glacia? What's up?"

Ice-blue eyes focused on his face. "What isn't?" Clear blue, set in a perfect Oriental face. He looked down, stirring his soup. "I can't beat this hypothermia." She felt him flinch. "Therapy with you helps — temporarily — but I never stay warm. I have to ... keep using the techniques you taught

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me ... every day. And it helps, but it's not changing anything." His hand had frozen in the middle of a stir. "I'm sorry, Fran. I know we've gone over this before and I know you're doing all you can. I guess, just lately, I've been slipping. If I don't keep up with therapy I get so cold."

He put down the spoon, cleared his throat and leaned across the table. "Why haven't you been keeping up with your therapy, *Ms.* Mitsunaga?" *Ah, Dr. Isakson speaking.* Glacia smiled. When he called her Ms., it was Doctor to Patient; Glacia, it was friend to friend; and Doctor, it was Employee to Employer, or colleague to colleague.

"I've been ... busy. A lot on my mind. Besides, all this talk about frozen people undermines my attempts to think warm."

"Glazy, if you can't handle hearing people talk about cryogenic suspension this is definitely not the right job for you! At least you're head of the Rare Disorder half and not the Cryogenic Suspension half of the Institute. You only have to listen to people talk, not work in the freezers." She shivered. "Sorry," he touched her hand, "but you've been working side-by-side with CSR for over two years now. Hearing talk about 'frozen people' is not a reasonable excuse for slacking off on your therapy."

"Yes, but you're talking about normal conversation. What I'm hearing isn't normal talk. They're bringing someone out."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, listen." Fran took a spoonful of soup and turned his attention away from the table. Against her will, Glacia's eyes found the window behind Fran. The snow was coming down faster. She could see it melting on the walkways, beginning to stick on the grass.

After a moment Fran nodded, returned his attention to his lunch. "You're right, it is the major topic of conversation. But if you're getting more negative reinforcement from outside you should be spending more time in the alpha state, thinking warm. You know that."

"Yes, well...."

"Yes, well what? What's stopping you?"

"I've been trying, Fran, really I have. It's just that I can't seem to maintain my concentration long enough. Beta thought patterns keep slipping in." She ran a cold finger over the wrist monitor she wore all the time, an unobtrusive bracelet. Temperature slightly below normal, brain waves normal for a waking, thinking state of mind.

"Then something else is bothering you." Statement of fact, demanding an answer.

"Jefferson." Sour sound. She saw Fran nod slightly. "You know if I just gave in to him, all my problems getting funding, staff, and equipment would be over."

"But he wouldn't just be satisfied with your surrender, Glazy. He'd have

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to be sure everyone knew what you'd done. He'd want to show off his trophy a bit first, like he did with Shelly Welsh."

"Well, she hasn't done too badly. Her job's secure enough and she gets all the funding she needs for CSR." She pushed her coffee cup aside. "Anyway, he hasn't mentioned funding for days. Under a pretense of concern for Rare Disorder Research doing a good job of curing CSR's first revived patient of a not-so-rare disorder, he's been calling me in constantly to talk. He acts so solicitous. But arthritis, after all, is easy to cure. A few drugs, a little biofeedback therapy from you, and the man will be fine. But Jesee keeps dweling on it, an excuse to corner me. I think he's up to something."

"We both know what he's up to, sweets." Fran smiled, again taking one of her hands in his. "It's just a matter of figuring out what his next strategy is." He chafed her hand briefly and released it, returning to his lunch. "In the meantime, Ms. Mitsunaga, why don't you go up to the biofeedback lab — comfortably empty since it's my lunch hour — and get in some long-overdue therapy time?"

"I won't be needed till tomorrow to consult on treatment of CSR's patient." She smiled at Fran, her eyes sparkling like the snow falling steadily outside. "So, OK. Will you check in to be sure I'm out in an hour?"

"You bet." He watched her rise, and as she walked away, surveyed the people in the room whose eyes followed her graceful figure. *Cold, tough,* he thought, *and too attractive for her own good.*

Glacia strode down the hall, head up, as alway cataloging such things as who was working and who not, the cleanliness of the area. Her palm pressed the lock below the sign that read "Biofeedback Therapy — Authorized Personnel Only." The room looked less like a hospital room than like someone's living room. Decorated in muted, solid colors, furnished with large, soft couches and chairs, each innocent-looking piece of furniture was a piece of sophisticated equipment designed to heighten and reinforce the trance state while reading the vital functions of anyone who sat in it. A computer terminal, as ordinary as those found in every home, took up one corner of the room. Glacia walked to the terminal, keyed in her identity and requested the temperature of the room be raised two degrees. She stood a moment, considering. Her favorite chair, a cushy cherry armchair, was situated against the wall near the terminal, facing the window. Normally Glacia focused her thoughts outside, on sunshine. The view today was of solid white. The snow had begun to cover everything, and was coming down thick and fast, obscuring the view of the city beyond. She asked the computer to shade the window. She tapped out, "Begin therapy. Run." and settled herself in the chair.

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Immediately she began to feel warmer. Her mind cleared of worries about funding and institute directors, and what images remained were of warmth: sun on sand and bare skin, lying on a beach, hot, no breezes; a leisurely soak in a hot tub, a jacuzzi with hot water bubbling all around; a soft fur blanket and a lover's body, snuggled together by a fire; soft, warm, hot. As she drifted deeper, as if towards sleep, her mind settled into long, slow theta rhythms. No longer conciously directing her thoughts to heat and warmth and relaxation, images came unbidden to her mind.

Marshall, pulling slowly up out of deepest sleep, registered, without words, cold, numbness in fingers and toes, familiar aches everywhere else. In the moment that his mind slipped finally over the threshold from unconcious sleep to conscious thought, feeling more than usually foggy, his first thought was "Coffee." Intending to get up, wake his wife and get her started making breakfast, he tried to rise — and couldn't. Muscles simply didn't respond with anything more than a twitch. It suddenly occurred to him that he might be sick. Sick. Hospitals. Cryogenic suspension. He understood, finally, what was happening.

This time he tried a less ambitious task, that of opening his eyes. Muscles twitched and jumped. A wet pressure swabbed across one eye, then the other. He tried again. Open. Focusing, he decided, would take time, though no conscious control would be needed. Overhead was a blur of dim lighting. He watched for a while, practicing blinking. After a small amount of time, he noticed a blur — a face, he thought — move in and out of view to his right, so that he wasn't startled at all when he heard a voice repeating his name. Following that perception, he began to notice other sounds: soft hums and beeps of equipment, distant voices. The voice near him was still calling his name, but the effort he'd taken to do so much — so little! — had already exhausted him. His weighted eyelids slipped closed. He slept.

Glacia rubbed her eyes. She imagined they felt gritty, gummy. But that was ridiculous; she'd been out for less than an hour and that time wasn't spent sleeping. Or was it? Strange, she couldn't remember the whole session. Usually she could. She leaned her head back against the chair and concentrated. Did I sleep? It seems as though I dreamt — of waking, of someone calling my name.

She was still trying to sort out just what had happened during the session when Fran entered the room. She stood and met him halfway to the door. He reached but her hand was already on its way up to meet his. Gently he turned her wrist to read the monitor. "Fine. Your temperature is well above your normal and I see strong al-

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pha waves still there. How do you feel?"

She shook her head as if to clear away the dreams, but said, "Warm. A little dazed."

Fran watched her, concerned, but she seemed unwilling to say more. He released her wrist and turned to look at the darkened window. "Well, I'm glad you had time to relax and warm up. I'm sorry to say you may need the calm. Dr. Jefferson wants to see you in five minutes, in his office."

Glacia leaned against the wall beside the door to Dr. Jefferson's office, breathing slowing in measured rhythms, storing strength and clearing her mind for another encounter with her boss. There were always undercurrents to their meetings, subtle power plays just below the surface where she couldn't quite grasp or control them, that threatened to pull her under every time she faced him. Fear. Fear of losing. She had to fight the fear or she would lose the battle. The worst moments were those when, cold and shivering, beaten, almost drowning, she wanted to finish the game by naming it, by shouting at Jesee, "I know what you're doing here. The game you're playing is sexual harassment. The rules you play by are your rules, not mine. Mine are the rules that make what you're doing illegal — illegal for the last hundred years. I won't play by your rules. I won't play." But in naming the game she wouldn't end it. He would deny the truth, ask her for proof, and — having none — she would only have lost, lost again, and the game would continue.

Long exhale of breath, dark eyelashes resting softly, briefly on olive cheeks. She turned and knocked on the word DIRECTOR in DR. JESEE L. JEFFERSON — DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH FACILITIES and opened the door as she heard him respond.

He was standing with his back to her looking out the window behind his desk at the view, white and silent, snow-covered. The sky seemed a dull gray mirror of the world below. The light silhouetted his lank frame, accentuating his slightly rounded shoulders, and lit his white spray of hair in a halo around his head. He turned and settled into his chair. Objectively she observed his pallor and dark circles under his black eyes, and for a moment wanted to feel pity for him. Then as he looked up at her — and his eyes traveled down and back up — she detected a malicious glint in them and any warm feelings were swept away by a cold draft of anger.

"Sit, Dr. Mitsunaga, sit." He followed her movements down into the chair, a leer — she couldn't see it as a smile — pulling up first one corner of his mouth, then the other to match it. Glacia began to feel a chill again. "I must say, you are looking exceedingly well. But then, I've just called you from a session with Dr. Isakson, haven't I? He seems to be doing a good

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job on you!" He leaned his elbows on the desk and hunched forward. He let the leer slip away. "I'm sure you've heard we've successfully awakened Mr. Hendon down in CSR." She nodded her head, though, in fact, she hadn't heard anything. "We are going to get quite a lot of good PR out of this and I expect the more stories with happy endings we have in reviving these people, the more publicity we will get and the more funding." Glacia shifted in her chair and switched her focus to look out the window. Cold as it was out there, the view was more comforting than watching her aging boss watch her. Every time she caught his gaze wandering from her face to various other parts of her anatomy she saw herself, for that moment, as Jesee must see her, all curves and warm flesh, oozing sensuality. She didn't like the image. So she watched a few last flakes of snow fall and felt, more than saw, the sun begin to break through the thick cloud cover.

His tone shifted to nearly a whisper, deep and throaty. "While I was watching the revival I kept thinking about you," he paused, "and of our earlier discussion about funding. I know how important Rare Disorder Research is to you and, in fact, to Cryogenic Suspension Research also. It occurred to me that one solution might be if we tried mating," a slight pause, "your department with CSR. Of course Shelly — Dr. Welsh — would be in charge of the enlarged department, in view of her seniority in this hospital and her broader experience in all fields." He swiveled his chair to bring himself into her line of sight, interrupting her unfocused stare. "I am aware of your great concern for your department and think this would be a good solution since your research is so crucial to CSR. Staffs could be combined, thus saving a great deal of money. You wouldn't, of course, have to take a cut in pay. Only your title would change to that of assistant. I feel sure you would be quite willing to make some personal sacrifices for the good of RDR, wouldn't you?"

"I'm sorry, Dr. Jefferson, but I disagree with you. Although RDR has quite a bit to offer CSR, CSR has nothing to offer us. Therefore, logically, and all PR considerations aside, if the two departments were to merge it ought to be Rare Disorder on top." Glacia was pleased with the neutral tone of her voice. Inside, she was shouting at him.

"Perhaps, perhaps. The correct solution may not yet be within my grasp." He rose and came to accompany her to the door. "Why don't we just do a little brainstorming over dinner tonight. Perhaps we can find a solution together that will make us all happy."

"I have a late appointment tonight."

"What a shame! Well, tomorrow then?"

"I really don't think that would be

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possible, Doctor. I will, however, give your suggestions the consideration they deserve." The thoughful expression on his face was the last thing she saw as she turned and hurried down the hall.

Although she had spent several hours over paper work since her discussion with Jefferson, she entered the biofeedback lab with all her anger still intact. To anyone who didn't know her, or even to those who knew her but not intimately, she appeared her normal cool and calm self. Fran already knew she had been with Jefferson, though, and he'd known her intimately for many years.

Glacia was staring at nothing. "Come on, dear. I want to hear all about it." She turned away from him and began pacing about the room, weaving in and out between chairs and consoles, her black hair bouncing at each step, hands locked behind her. She stopped beside her favorite therapy chair and rested two small hands on its back. She leaned into her words. "Oh, that monster! If I don't sleep with him he's going to put RDR under Cryogenics and demote me to second in command." Her fingers bit into the leather chair. "If only he would — just once — slip up and say it right out."

"Glazy, we've been through this before and you know you couldn't prosecute him on your word against his alone. You'd need witnesses." He moved around behind her and began deep massage on her shoulders and neck. She dropped her head forward.

"Oh, but dammit, Fran. This can't go on. I just can't stand having my department threatened day in and day out on account of his ego. If he weren't such a scarecrow to look at, if he weren't so stiff and correct all the time, I'd do it and get it over with."

"You wouldn't, Glazy, and I know it. Even if you liked the man you wouldn't sleep with him for favors. You've worked too long and given up too much to get where you are today to sell yourself so short. Here, sit down where I can reach you better." She moved into the chair and allowed him to give her a quick, professional massage.

She relaxed under the pressure of his hands. After a moment she reached up and patted his hand with hers. "I'm feeling better, now."

He turned to the computer terminal and tapped at a few keys. "Are you off work now?"

"Um-hum."

"Good. I notice your temperature has dropped back down ... pretty quickly. But it seems to have stabilized at a slightly higher temperature than your average." He turned back to her, one hand still resting on the terminal's keyboard. "Feel it?"

Glacia experimentally wiggled her long, slim fingers. Surprised, "Yes!" Long years of therapy had made her acutely aware of her body temperature. She was not surprised to be

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warmer, she was surprised she hadn't noticed it earlier.

Fran tapped at the keys, watched a graph appear. "Yes. Well. Anything unusual about the last session?" Glacia shook her head slightly, but her brow furrowed. "You seemed ... disturbed ... when I came in at the end of your session today. Something *did* happen."

Glacia shook her head again, not denial, but trying to shake off the clinging webs of the almost-dream she'd felt at her last therapy session. "I think I ... I fell asleep." Peculiar, though, how distinctly unsettled the memory made her.

Fran touched another key, peered at the display. "Interesting. Whatever did happen differently in your last session, it may have caused some more permanent metabolic change. If you have the time and are willing, I'd like to see if you can't attain that state again."

She laced her fingers in her lap and, looking down at her hands, felt added warmth flow between them. Wondering what it would be like to be warm — normal — all the time, she said, "Let's do it."

Fran pushed back a straight chair and sat at the terminal. Still watching her hands, still feeling warm, hoping to stay that way and yet feeling something else ... something — troubling ... she listened to the clicking of the keys and the muted tones of the computer acknowledging commands. Finally, Fran spoke. "Ready."

She let herself begin to slip down into that quiet space in her mind.

Marshall fought up out of a wash of images, strange, foreign. *Bad dreams,* he thought. *Comes of sleeping too long. Sleeping — how long?* All at once he tried to sit up, open his eyes. He succeeded only in making himself dizzy and tired very quickly. Almost, he slipped back down to unconsciousness again, and the dreams tried to recapture him — an overwhelming fear of the cold (an image of snow falling, blanketing everything with white), an icy anger (image of a man with a spray of white hair, like a shower of icy crystals, against a background of a window with snow falling outside). He struggled against foreign emotions and images.

"Take it easy." The voice, smooth and close to his ear, broke the web of dreams he'd been caught in and brought him, finally, back into himself. He consciously relaxed. "One thing at a time, now." The voice belonged to a woman, he realized, still close. "I'll ask you to open your eyes in a moment, but first I'm going to run a swab over your eyelids. First the right." Damp pressure. "Now the left." Again. "All right now, try to open them." Blurry images slowly cleared. A face hovered above him. *Blonde,* he saw, and as his vision began to work again, *smiling, pretty, lines around the eyes, like my wife. My wife.* "Very good!" He watched her mouth mov-

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ing. "Next we'll try your voice." His throat worked. "But wait! Before you try speaking I want you to take a drink." *Coffee?* he thought. From somewhere a tube appeared with a nipple on the end. The fluid was clear and green and he didn't want to try it, but when he looked up at the woman's face above his he saw his wife and had to ask, so had to drink. He parted his lips, his teeth, and let the tube enter, closed his mouth and sucked at it. The warm stream down his throat made him aware how cold and dry he felt inside. He pulled at the liquid greedily. "Enough!" the girlish laugh did more than anything else to warm and revive him. "All right now, the world is waiting!"

"Mpff." He swallowed, experimentally tried clearing his throat. "Muygh." Again, swallow, small cough. "My wife?"

A hand, a chart, hovered between him and the face. "Your wife, yes. You are the first to be awakened. She is still in stasis. Extensive malignant cancer, I see. Yes. All right." She put the chart away and smiled down at him. "We are just perfecting techniques that will cure your wife, Mr. Hendon. We will be able to bring her out in a year or so" — she tried a stern smile on him — "provided, of course, you and the others we revive in the meantime do well. Do you understand?"

"Um-hum." The expenditure in energy was telling on him. He felt himself beginning to slip back again. For a moment the woman's voice held him to the here and now — but he didn't have the strength left to fight the pull, the pull of those images, of cold and snow and anger....

Glacia shook her head, rubbed her eyes. Asleep! She had been asleep! Had to have been because she could remember, distinctly, dreaming. She'd dreamt of a woman — face familiar and yet ... she couldn't put a name to it. No name but a feeling, love, almost worship. *This woman takes care of me, shelters me. My mother? No, more like* ... The more she tried to identify the woman, and the emotions, the further the dream slipped away. She rubbed at her eyes again, then suddenly remembered where she was. She blinked and turned to find Fran. He was sitting at the computer console, his back turned to its display, quietly watching her — which was unusual because he generally gathered all the information he needed from the readouts of instruments. Her brow furrowed in a question and he responded with a minimal smile.

"How you feeling?"

"Rather like I just woke up."

"Ms. Mitsunaga, I want you to give me your impressions of the session, from the moment you sat in the chair till now." He turned and tapped a key. "Recording — now."

He let her talk, asking no questions, till she'd reached the point where she tried to remember the dream, until

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it had slipped out of her reach. He touched a few more keys. Glacia could see the display flicker and re-form with a graph. She studied Fran's back as he studied the screen, noticing, with a slight sense of alarm, the tenseness overall, the stiffness in his back.

"Fran, what's up?"

He turned, again trying to reassure her with a little smile. "Your temperature, for one thing." Glacia took stock of her body and was surprised that, for the second time, she hadn't noticed until Fran pointed it out. He nibbled a knuckle and looked at her. He was debating, she knew, whether or not to tell 'the patient' more. After a moment his hand dropped to rest on the keyboard, he turned back and worked for a moment, modifying the display. Finally he said, "We've got some unusual patterns recorded from that session, Glacia. Come have a look."

She stood and looked over his shoulder at the screen. He touched a series of keys. "This is your average waking brain wave pattern, taken from your wrist monitor over a period of two years." He touched the upper left corner of the screen where the display showed several wavering lines. "For our purposes, then, this is you." He tapped a few more keys and touched the display in the upper right corner. "This is the averaged pattern of your therapy sessions for the past two years — not including today's. You can see the predominance of the wider, lower-frequency alpha rhythms here and here, and now and then a deepening into theta." Tap, tap. "And here, your sleeping pattern. Alpha, theta, and these deep patterns of delta waves." He swiveled his chair sideways and looked up at her. "Taken all together, we have a fair representation of your normal patterns."

Glacia nodded, looking at her patterns on the display. She studied the three representations of her mental processes and then focused on the blank screen in the lower right corner.

Fran followed her gaze. "Well, I see you're anticipating me, Dr. Mitsunaga." He smiled. Tap, tap. "Here is the output of your most recent session." Together they checked the patterns against the other three graphs. "You would expect the wave pattern to most closely resemble other therapy sessions you've had over the years" — he touched the upper right display — "or, if you'd fallen asleep and dreamt as you thought" — he touched the lower left — "like your sleeping pattern, but..."

"It looks most like my waking pattern! Fran, how can that be? I know I wasn't awake!" Her hand covered her waking pattern, as if, hiding it, she could make the new pattern fit with the others.

"I don't — quite — know. I've never seen anything like it. I've never read of it in journals. But there is more data we need to consider." Hands on the keyboard, Fran rearranged the display. Glacia's sleeping and therapy

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patterns disappeared. The two remaining graphs, the most recent session and the waking patterns enlarged and merged, one superimposed over the other. "Your normal, conscious pattern is here in red, the session's pattern in black."

"They're very nearly identical! I can't have been awake." She shook her head, thinking, *I don't understand.*

"You weren't." His finger traced an area where the two neatly merged. "Here the pattern appears identical." He called in a blowup of the section. "But if we look at it magnified, you'll see there are minute differences, mostly in amplitude. This new pattern had a narrower wave formation than your normal, as though it's a reflection of a mind at work. But not a reflection of your mind at work. You see" — the double graph reappeared and his finger followed a long split between the two jagged lines — "here the difference is very definite — not just amplitude, but pattern." He turned again to look up at her, and Glacia could see concern taking over his professional discourse. For the first time she felt fear — a line drawn with ice up her spine. Fran stood, turning his back on the screen, blocking it from her sight. He took her hands in each of his. "I ... I don't have proof, Glazy. I don't have enough data, but...."

"But what, Fran?"

"I can't be sure without more research, but...."

"Say it, will you?"

"In my professional opinion, I'd say the pattern of your last session was the waking pattern of someone else's mind." He gripped her hands, expecting, she guessed, a dramatic reaction. She merely sat and thought about that, pulse slowing, rational processes taking over.

Nonsense! was her first thought, but she couldn't dismiss Fran so lightly. So she settled for, "I really don't see how that could be so, Fran."

He releases his grip and returned to the terminal. "Neither do I, actually. But the theory fits the facts and — without trying to understand the why or the how — it's the simplest explanation." Fran relaxed. He meditatively worked at the keyboard while Glacia watched, she trying to sort through all the varied emotions and thoughts of the day and he looking for facts to prove or disprove his theory. After a few minutes had passed with the only sound the clicking of the keys under Fran's hands, he calmly turned and said, "There are a few more facts to be fitted in here."

Glacia stirred out of her reverie. "Oh? What?"

"Your session earlier today — it showed a similar disturbance in your patterns, not as strongly as the last session, but there, nonetheless. Also, after your therapy earlier today, your temperature came up one and one-half degrees and remained up till" — he looked at the scroll of information on the screen — "the middle of your talk

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with Jefferson, when it dropped and settled at one degree above your normal." He followed the words as they slid up the screen. "And ... you remained a half-degree warmer until you began this session and..." Tapping on the keys, pausing to read more information, "...when the ... other pattern emerged, your temperature again went up, this time nine-tenths of a degree, where it has been since." He looked around at her with a tentative smile. "At least, whatever is happening, it seems to be doing something right."

Glacia studied and wiggled her fingers, then turned her wrist to look at the monitor, as if not believing what her senses told her. She did feel warmer, better. Whatever brought that on had to be a good thing. "Yes." She smiled and rose, stretched. "I feel better! I also feel hungry. Would you like to join me for dinner?"

Fran reluctantly turned off the computer terminal. "No. I'd best get home to my cats. And I think I'll work at home tonight, too." He looked up at her. "Will you remember your therapy before bed?" She nodded. "Good. Let me walk you as far as the library. I've got to get a few books there and you'll need to be seen leaving with someone so Jesee'll believe your line about having a late date." His eyes twinkled and hers tossed sparks back. "He did ask you out, and you did give him a line, didn't you?"

As Glacia climbed the hill to her apartment, picking her way up the sidewalk between drifts of snow, she thought about the director of the Lenard-Fuller Institute of Research and the problems he made in her life. She'd worked long and hard for many long years to gain her position as head of RDR, and the only thing that prevented her from achieving more was Jefferson. And beyond that she wondered, as she stopped to wipe a little snow out of her open-heeled shoes, where it had all begun for her, this struggling against sexual harassment. She recalled, all through school, fighting off the hands and taunts of the boys. Teachers, male and female, never took her quite seriously. By virtue of her stunning beauty and voluptuous figure it was inferred that she couldn't be very bright; she was destined to be a baby-maker. Lord, she didn't want to be beautiful; she couldn't help it, though, she was.

She stopped on the steps leading into her building and looked up at the sky. April in San Francisco, the air crisp but not biting, the sky a brilliant blue. Toward the ocean, though she saw a line of clouds. *Oh, please, not more snow!*

Inside her apartment, shrugging out of the overcoat, her eye caught a picture on the mantel, her mother and father and herself at about age twelve. *There,* she thought, *is where it began.* Her handsome half-Japanese father, loving her, cherishing her, and never wanting to let her go. He wanted her to

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settle down, get married and live close to home. Grandchildren — he wanted dozens. *And now he's gone and I can't give him any of that. Ungrateful child, I am. But Mother, beautiful and strong, thwarted by Father and me from continuing her studies, always encouraged me to be whatever I wanted to be. She's proud of me, now. And fulfilled — off in Africa working on some dig....*

In the kitchen she stopped at the terminal and told the apartment computer, "Salad. No onions. Blue cheese dressing."

She took her salad to the table nested in the nook of bay windows and ate while watching that bank of clouds begin to roll in towards the city. She thought again of her parents: *No wonder I'm a confused adult. The messages were conflicting ... Be beautiful, be a fulfilled woman, settle down, get married, have kids; and — Be different, be what you are, use your mind, challenge yourself!*

She carried the empty bowl and fork to the cleaning unit, tossed them in, pushed a button and retired to the bedroom. After propping two pillows up against the wall, she stripped and settled on the bed, back straight against the pillows, legs crossed in a half-lotus position, and closed her eyes. Just a short session to satisfy Fran, then out of it and under the blanket, to sleep.

In the cold underground rooms of the Institute, Marshall awakened for the first time feeling as though he'd really come all the way back to consciousness. Just a minute after he realized where he was and why, he heard a whoosh of a door and a familiar woman's face appeared, smiling, over his.

"Good morning! Or should I say evening. How are you feeling?"

He licked his lips. "Fine," and was surprised that the word came out clearly.

"Would you like to sit up so we can talk comfortably?" At his nod, the bed began folding, contouring to raise him into an almost sitting position. "Good! I have lots to tell you! But before I do, I suppose it would be polite of me to answer any questions you might have."

While she talked he'd been inventorying assorted arthritic aches. All still there. He'd rather hoped they'd be gone when they woke him, but, he guessed, that would be a bit much to ask. He had questions, yes, but for the moment, the sound of her voice, her smiles and enthusiasm were doing him a world of good. "No, please. I'd rather you tell me what you want and I'll ask questions afterward."

Her hands opened in a gesture of acceptance. "Fine! First of all, my name is Dr. Welsh, and I'm head of Cryogenics here at the Lenard-Fuller Institute. The date is April 23, 2081, and since you were 'frozen' in 1983, that means you were in stasis for nine-

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ty-eight years. In that time the world has come a long way, I'm sure, as you'll be able to judge for yourself once you re-enter it, but for now we're going to forget 'out there' and concern ourselves with" — she poked a finger into his belly — 'in there.' " Despite himself, he was charmed by this woman's girlish playfulness. "I know you're experiencing some pain from the arthritis" — he closed his eyes, checking that, yes, it was still there — "but some of that isn't the disease; rather, it's the aftereffect of being revived. Believe it or not, in the less than twelve hours since you first awakened you've been given quite a few drugs — some to help you recover from suspension and some to begin curing your condition — so you're well on the road to being relieved of the pain you've lived with most of your life." Her voice and expression became less bubbly now, more serious. "It should take only a few weeks of medication and then, once every six months or so, you'll be in for a checkup and, possibly, a few more drugs." She studied him for a moment, then stood and paced around the room, stopping finally at the foot of his bed.

"I understand that — in your time — the role of the mind's power over health and illness was not well understood." Her voice reflected her doubts. "Is that true?"

He shook his head. "I'm not sure what you mean."

"Well, the mind has a lot of power, you see. If you believe you'll be ill, you will be. Often just knowing you'll be cured will cure you. It's not that disease doesn't exist. It's just that the mind can magnify the effects of a disease, hold onto it long after it's gone, and sometimes manufacture a disorder completely." A quick reassurance. "Not, of course, that that's your case at all. But because you were raised in a time when this was not generally accepted to be so" — her tone again reflecting her amazement that anyone could not *know* it was so — "it may be difficult for you to free yourself completely of the pain you've lived with so long." Her pause and direct gaze were a question: Do you understand?

"You're right, I don't accept it. It sounds like hogwash to me."

"Hogwash?"

"It means nonsense. Oh, never mind. Please continue."

"Right." She smiled. "It's apparent you'll need help to free yourself of the mental ghosts of your arthritis. The first and most difficult step will be to convince yourself that you do have control over your own body and for that we will put you into the capable hands of our biofeedback therapist, Dr. Isakson, first thing tomorrow. The techniques are simple and" — a smile — "painless." She tweaked his toe through the cover and went back to sit beside the bed. "Any questions so far?"

"None."

"Excellent! Would you be ready for a visitor, then? The head of the Insti-

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tute asked to be called in as soon as you fully awakened, and he's in the next room, ready to meet you." At Marshall's reluctant nod, she rose and turned to the door. "Dr. Jefferson? Mr. Hendon is ready to see you now."

The man who entered the room was tall and thin and slightly stooped, as if he'd carried too large a burden for too many years. His hair was gray-white and frizzed around his head in a style known to Marshall as an Afro. He walked to the bed, turned briefly and sent a look of dismissal to Shelly Welsh, and turned back, saying, "Good awakening, Mr. Hendon. May I call you Marshall? My name is Dr. Jefferson, and I'm director of the Lenard-Fuller Institute of Research" — a hand extended out, palm up, swung around, encompassing the whole room — "in which you now rest." He settled himself in the chair beside the bed. Marshall noted the dark flesh hanging loosely under the man's eyes, as though he had not been sleeping well. He studied the director, trying to place an uncomfortable feeling of familiarity. "How are you feeling?"

"Well enough."

"Excellent. Is there anything I can do for you? It must be very difficult for you having left all friends and family behind in another century."

"My wife is in stasis. Until she's brought out I will be pretty lonely."

"Loneliness, yes, it's hard to combat." The doctor was looking beyond him, seeming to see another time and place. "I'm unmarried myself, though there's a bright young woman...."

Marshall sensed the man's weariness had allowed him to show more emotion than he felt comfortable revealing. To cover the embarrassment he said, "Ah, woman-trouble, hmm? One hundred years, and the battle between the sexes isn't over."

"Battle between the—? Oh, yes, I see. No, I'm afraid not. Did you have woman-trouble, too, then?"

"Not so much. But you're having some?"

"Yes, a woman, quite a woman, really. I've been trying to get her to — see me — but I'm afraid my approach may have put her off."

"Your approach?"

"Direct, I'd say, but fairly subtle."

"Maybe you should try an indirect and friendly tack. Women seem to go for the friendly protector type."

"Hmm. Friendly. Yes." Jesee looked at the clock. "Well, I came to offer you my assistance and you seem to be giving me advice." The doctor stood. "I really shouldn't keep you, though it's been pleasant visiting with you." Marshall saw the spray of hair backlit by the overheard lights, felt again as though he'd known, and disliked, this man, had seen him somewhere before. "If there is anything you should need at any time in the future, please do feel free to call on me."

Dr. Welsh re-entered the room as the doctor left. She came and took his hand between hers and gazed earnestly

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at him. "I'm retiring now, but my bedroom is very close to yours and if you need anything — just anything — please push this buzzer" — she nodded towards the button at the side of his bed — "and I'll come running." She smiled and squeezed his hand. "OK?"

He couldn't help smiling back. "OK." He studied her figure as she walked away and out the door thinking, *There is something I could need from her. 'Anything — just anything.' Well, you know what she meant by that.* Her tender attentions and her girlish laugh — so much, so much like his wife's — what else could she be offering with all of that? *And who knows, maybe that's part of the therapy these days.* He fell asleep, thinking, *Yes, I'll take her up on the offer when I get strong enough to show her what a twentieth century man can do. Women ... never could resist me....*

Glacia came to with a start. She was still sitting cross-legged on the bed, naked. Awareness gave her goosebumps. She unfolded her legs and immediately as the blood began to rush in felt sharp pins-and-needles from her knees to her feet. *Lord!* She realized the room was completely dark, and looked for the luminous digital readout of her clock alarm. *Past midnight! I've been in the alpha state for hours! How's that possible?* Cold, she scrambled under the covers and pulled and tucked them around her, shivering and waiting to get warm again. While she waited for warmth and sleep to arrive she tried to remember any of the last few hours. She remembered drifting into the trancelike alpha state and — it seemed like — there were a few other images just around the corner of conscious awareness, if only she could reach around and grab them. But no, she couldn't get them. She was just too tired and they were just too nebulous. The whole dream-feeling seemed as though it had happened long ago, in another life. And coming to a minute ago, that had felt like coming awake after a long sleep. Perhaps, yes, perhaps she'd just been tired and fallen asleep during the session.

Her body heat, trapped in the blankets and surrounding her began to comfort her and loosen her mind from the tangle of doubts and worries till at last she drifted back down into sleep and dreams. Her dreams were awash with images she couldn't understand: cars, bumper to bumper, and a feeling of impatience; a building filled with noisy machinery — pride of ownership; lovely, dark-skinned Chicano women working at the machines, swaying into a room humbly — again, pride of ownership; a delicate blonde woman puts the baby down and comes to hold me, comfort me — almost that same pride of ownership.

When Marshall awakened early the next morning, it was to the sunlight of

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Dr. Welsh's smile. She had a hand resting on each of his shoulders and she called his name again softly. "Mr. Hendon? Oh, there! You're awake. Good. You have an appointment and I thought you might like some time to freshen up before we wheel you out into the great wide world of the Institute."

He looked beyond her, to a wheelchair parked by the door. That, at least, hadn't changed much. A bit more streamlined, perhaps, a new gadget or two added but basically the same handled chair on wheels. And, no doubt, the same hospital rules that no matter how well the patient felt, he would ride, not walk, to his appointments. He felt ... grumpy. He considered complaining that he could, he thought, walk. But then, eyeing Dr. Welsh, a blonde curl freed from the bun at the nape of her neck hanging over her shoulder, he thought how much more fun, how delightful it would be to have to lean on her while transferring to and from the chair. So he worked up his most charming smile and said, "Yes I would. Will you help me to the john?"

"John? Oh! Yes, here."

Leaning on the sink in the privacy of the small room, he examined the familiar face that hadn't changed in nearly one hundred years. It was remarkable that after only one day of consciousness in this new century he felt so fit, so well. He didn't really wonder at it, though. Twentieth century medicine was beyond his ken, so he expected twenty-first century technologies to be a complete mystery. For example, this mind-control hogwash. Well, if they were convinced it worked, it probably did, although how that could be was beyond imagining.

Feeling only a little shaky, he opened the bathroom door and put an arm around Dr. Welsh, welcoming her closeness more than her support as they walked to the wheelchair. The pressure of her hip against his thigh was having a ... stimulating effect. Their eyes met for a moment as they matched smile for smile. He allowed himself to be turned and lowered and immediately missed the feel of the woman against him. *One hundred years I've gone without.* He smiled.

He endured the trip up the elevator and through the halls, despite the gnawing pain in his flesh caused by the warm temperature of the Institute outside of the chilled area of CSR. The biofeedback lab was more comfortable, not only because of its cooler temperature but because he was allowed to get up and move around it, and try out the couch and chairs, which were all big and soft. He settled in a solid cherry-colored armchair nearest the one piece of equipment he saw in the room — a computer terminal, he guessed. He looked up expectantly at Dr. Welsh.

"The therapist should be here in a minute, Mr. Hendon. I'm going to leave you alone here. Relax, OK?"

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"I would relax more if you'd call me Marshall."

She stoped in mid-turn. "Marshall. All right. Relax, Marshall, Dr. Isakson will be here shortly." The door swung closed behind her. In the silence that followed he looked out the picture window facing him and thought, *She didn't tell me her name. Absent-minded? Or, perhaps, playing a game of hard-to-get?* The prospect pleased him. His eye focused on the view outside. As he heard the door open, he realized what he was seeing — San Francisco covered with snow!

Without waiting for an introduction, he asked, "I thought Dr. Welsh said it was April!"

Fran, following his gaze, laughed. "It is! We're having a spot of unusual weather, I'm afraid. Don't worry, friend. The world isn't being engulfed by a glacial age. They predict the snow will stop coming down and begin melting off by this afternoon." He moved around to partially break Marshall's stare. "Perhaps I should introduce myself?"

Marshall looked up. "Hardly necessary," but he said it with a smile. "I think we know who we are and why we're here. Maybe we can just get on with this" — he wanted to say 'hogwash' — "therapy."

"Fine." Fran went to settle himself at the terminal's keyboard. "Has Dr. Welsh explained to you what biofeedback is about?"

"Yes." Half-truth, but he wanted to get this over with.

"Good. Then we'll begin with a simple test. You'll begin by changing your body temperature a little. To start, I want you to get comfortable, lean back in the chair, close your eyes and relax. Good. Now I want you to listen to my voice, continue paying attention to me, but block out all other sensations. Just relax, breathe deeply, and listen to my voice." *This sounds like hypnotism,* Marshall thought, *garbage.* But knowing he would have to participate, he gave it his grudging attention. "I don't want you to concentrate on anything. No effort at all, but if you think, think of warm things, like a hot beach, or sitting close to a fire, or soaking in a steaming tub of water. Think of warmth. Good."

He was having trouble giving in to relaxation and warmth. Other thoughts kept intruding and when they did he knew the therapist was aware of them because every time it happened the man's voice would return, directing him to stop thinking and relax, feel the warmth. *Stuff and nonsense! And yet, there had to be something to it or how would the man know when I'm thinking of other things besides....* "Don't let any thought intrude now, just warmth and rest. Relax, imagine yourself on a beach, the sun beating on your skin, the heat soaking in." So he tried, tried to let himself go, relax and feel warmth, heat. The therapist's voice no longer intruded, so he knew he was doing it, doing it well. He did feel warmer, relaxed and the world

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around him seemed to hush, his mind stilled then—

Yank! He felt a powerful tug at his mind and his eyes flew open and for just a moment he felt himself to be somewhere else, *someone* else. The feeling was so frightening, so *alien* the shock brought him very suddenly back out of trance and, heart pounding, into the present reality of the quiet room and Dr. Isakson beside his chair, hands gripping Marshall's arm.

Fran reached back to the terminal, tapped a key and said, "Recording. What did you feel? What happened?"

Marshall didn't want to think about it; he wanted not to think about it. "I ... I don't know ... I was feeling warm and relaxed one second and the next it was as though I were in another body, looking out."

"What did you see?"

"A ... A room, a bedroom. I don't know. It happened so quickly." He dropped his forehead into his hands. He hated this feeling, heart thumping, limbs trembling. "I'd like to go back — go back to my room, if you don't mind."

"No, that would be fine. I'll call Shelly."

"Shelly?"

"Dr. Welsh."

Ah, so that's her name. There now, there's a pleasant distraction.

Glacia sat up suddenly, bathed in sweat. *What a horrible dream!* She'd dreamt she was a man, sick, pained. Fran had been there, too. It seemed so real. She looked at the clock. *My God! It's past eight! I've overslept and I don't feel rested at all!* She tapped the bedside computer keyboard. "Coffee, black. Uniform to bathroom." She disappeared into the shower — a quick rub to wash off the sweat, wishing she could wash away the lingering memory of the nightmare. Not just her mind, her body remembered the dream. She distinctly remembered the feeling of larger limbs, stronger muscles, and *hair*, for goodness sake, *all over*. She shuddered, glad she wasn't born male.

She grabbed the coffee, gulped a scorching mouthful and ran, sloshing the liquid onto the floor and her uniform, out the door, down the stairs and right up onto a moving, crowded trolley heading down the hill. One foot hung on the step, one hand grabbed the rail, the other clutched the half-empty cup of coffee. A friendly native wrapped a hand around her elbow, helping to keep her on the trolley. "Thanks," she smiled up at him, but he just nodded.

The dream still had her caught up; she felt as though she must surely still be dreaming, a nightmare. Going to be half an hour late for work on a pretty important day — everyone would notice — hair damp and hanging in a black sheet, no makeup. *My shoes!* She noticed she was wearing her slippers, still, and looked around at the snow, shivering with no coat. *I'll never*

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make it through this day, she thought, despairing, leaning her head against the arm of the friendly stranger who, except for his continued hold on her elbow, seemed completely unaware of her.

At the stop at the bottom of the hill she hopped off, again thanking her rescuer, and trotted up the stairs into the Institute. Inside, she kept trotting, heading for her office, trying to ignore the looks the staff was giving her. *If I can just make it to my office*, she thought, jogging down the hall, *before I run into—*

Dr. Jefferson blocked her path. "Good morning, Dr. Mitsunaga." *The devil must have been just standing there waiting for me.* "See you in my office in an hour?"

Gritting her teeth, "Yes, sir," she walked around him, into her office.

She no sooner sat at her desk, kicking off her wet slippers and rubbing her cold feet on the rug than a green light winked on her computer console. *Why now?* She keyed, "Phone on."

Fran's face appeared on the screen. "Talk to you?"

"In person?" He nodded. "This minute?"

"Soon. I'll have a cup of coffee waiting for you. Looks like you need it."

Glacia sighed as she passed the biofeedback lab, turning to face the next door, the door to Fran's office. She took a deep breath, wishing she were not feeling so exhausted at only nine in the morning. She lifted her hand to palm the door open but it whooshed out of her way before she completed the motion. Fran greeted her on the other side, cup in hand.

"Come on, sit down." He led her to a chair with a view of the ever-present computer terminal. "You look like hell, Glazy. How do you feel?"

As he sat at the keyboard, she asked, "Are you speaking as my doctor?"

"That's right, Ms. Mitsunaga." Grim smile.

I don't need this right now. "I feel like I look. I've had a horrible night."

"I know." They both glanced at her wrist monitor. "It's no wonder you're not feeling well, after a night with very little sleep."

"Little sleep! What are you talking about? I fell asleep from the trance state early in the evening, woke once, went back to bed and overslept by at least an hour! I must've gotten twelve hours!" She pressed both hands against the coffee cup. "Though I admit I don't feel as though I slept so long."

"You didn't. The time you spent asleep was" — he checked the computer — "less than five hours."

She wanted to argue, deny it. She looked at him and, mentally, looked inside herself. The truth was there in her edgy mood, her fuzzy perception of the world around her. Her body confirmed his statement: she had not had enough sleep. "Then what, pray tell,

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was I doing the rest of the time?"

"You were doing the same thing you did yesterday during your therapy sessions." He was watching her expression closely. "You were living another person's life vicariously. Look, Glacia, I know you didn't believe me yesterday when I told you your brain put out someone else's patterns, but today I have more proof. I think I can even tell you whose patterns you're picking up."

Again she wanted to dismiss his claims as nonsense. She could see him patiently waiting for her decision: trust and believe or deny and dismiss? She didn't want to believe him. Not yet quite sure what he was going to tell her, all consequences unknown, there was still that persistent human hope that if you just deny the facts long and hard enough, if you don't give any reality to the thing you fear, it won't come to exist. But the thing — whatever it was that was causing all this — already did have reality she couldn't deny. She ran a delicate, long-fingered hand down a bare arm, *Hair — all over my body.* The dream, the unsettling sensations after each therapy session, coming to in the middle of the night still in the half-lotus, twelve hours out — not all sleeping — and awakening feeling emotionally drained and exhausted: she couldn't refuse to see that something was happening. She looked up at Fran. "OK, tell me what you've got."

Grinning, "Right," he turned to the computer. "It started with yesterday's late-morning session. Let me run up a chart...." He worked at the keyboard for a minute. "There. See? I've asked the computer to list major shifts in your brain's output for the last twenty-four hours, including similar rhythms showing different patterns — so that when you were in a predominantly alpha-wave rhythm, but you started showing someone else's patterns embedded in the alpha-waves, it's listed, too. Now here's that first session" — his finger touched a list of times — "and you can see for yourself you exhibited an unusual pattern for twenty minutes. Now let me add body-temperature changes to the chart."

At the mention of temperature, Glacia realized again that she was warmer, really warmer. In fact, aside from cold feet caused by damp slippers, she'd felt no discomfort due to being cold since yesterday around noon. She turned her wrist and touched the monitor. She wasn't surprised to see that her temperature was up fully two degrees. If the trend continued she would be up another degree or two today and — for the first time in her life — she would be maintaining a normal temperature. Warm at last! Nothing that could cure her chronic hypothermia could be bad for her! She looked at the chart Fran was compiling, looked at the clock running in the corner of the computer's screen. "Fran, I have an appointment with Jefferson in about forty-five minutes. I'll trust that

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the data will support your theory thus far, if you can just give me a brief synopsis of what you think is causing all this."

Reluctantly, Fran turned his back to the computer terminal. Once he began talking, though, reluctance gave way to enthusiasm for a new theory. "All right, then. The data show three distinct lapses in your usual patterns, each one beginning with your attempt to generate alpha-wave patterns. In the later two incidents, the second starting shortly after four yesterday afternoon, and the third beginning yesterday evening around eight, the pattern you picked up matches the first session's pure pattern, but in the last two sessions there was some overlap, or weaving of your pattern into the other's. From eight P.M. last night to eight A.M. this morning the switching of your patterns with ... the other ... gets very complex."

"And this other pattern ... it's consistent? I mean, it's always the same pattern?"

"Yes, very definitely it is one person's pattern."

"And you think you know whose mind is ... interfering with mine?"

"Yes. In fact, I had him in therapy this morning. While I was recording his brain waves, your pattern emerged for" — again he looked at the screen — "thirty-seven seconds. Clear as if you were in the room with me. Which you were, in a way."

Glacia remembered, distinctly, dreaming of seeing Fran in the therapy lab. "At what time did that happen?"

"Seven twenty-seven this morning. You 'woke up' less than an hour later."

Glacia reached across to put the cup of untouched coffee on Fran's desk. She sighed. Facts. The cold facts were there, indelibly written in the computer's memory, if she had any need of them. But she didn't need facts; she had feelings. All she had to do was examine her experience in the last day, and the pattern that emerged there was clear. But what was really happening here? Fran was telling her that someone else's mind-patterns were obliterating hers, but now and then she felt — yes, that was it, the dreams, the experiencing of a male body — she slipped over into ... *his* mind. "You said you had 'him' in therapy this morning. Who's 'he'?"

"Name's Mr. Marshall Hendon, he's—"

"The man they removed from stasis yesterday. I see."

Fran and Glacia sat silent, each lost in thought. After a moment, Glacia stood.

"Glacia, we need more information. Mr. Hendon's due for another session with me at three this afternoon. Can you arrange to be free then?"

"Sure." She headed for the door. "I'll skip lunch." At the door she turned back. "Fran, do you have any idea what's happening here?"

"Hmm? Well, yes, but only ideas. I'd rather not voice an opinion."

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Her eyes narrowed at him. "It frightens you, too, doesn't it?" She turned and as the door closed behind her she thought, *And it's not happening to you.*

This time Glacia walked unhesitantly up to the door of Jefferson's office and knocked. She would be damned if she'd feel cowed for being a half-hour late to work once in two years. She entered boldly after knocking, not waiting for Jesee to respond. She caught him unaware, standing before a mirror at the side of the room, fluffing the white froth of thinning hair. He half-turned, surprised, but recovered gracefully enough.

"Ah, Dr. Mitsunaga. Please sit, make yourself comfortable." He walked to the window, stood looking out at the clearing skies, snow melting and dripping off the trees in fiery drops lit by sunlight. He turned back to look at her. Under brows furrowed as if in concern, his eyes were intense and direct, appraising her. "You were late today" — she shifted, preparing to protest — "which is remarkable only because it's the first time in your entire employment here you've not been in on time, or early. I was inspired this morning to look at your record and discovered, to my surprise, you haven't even had a day's vacation in two years." Glacia watched his nervous pacing, wondering where this was leading. "When I saw you come in this morning, I was necessarily concerned by your appearance — not that you could ever look bad" — he tried a smile — "but rather I'm deeply concerned that you look exhausted and worn." There was some subtle shift in his approach today, Glacia noted.

But she did feel exhausted. Try as she might, she was having trouble concentrating on what Jesee was saying. He paced and talked and all the while Glacia was trying to fight off a peculiar fuzzy feeling at the base of her skull. She tried to pay attention: "...that I, too, am long overdue for vacation, and I thought we might...." But important as the words were, she was losing hold. The tingling at the edges of her mind intensified and she thought, *I need to wake up, wake up — I feel like I'm falling asleep. I can't surrender to* ... and at the last moment realized it was not sleep, but the losing of her consciousness to another she was feeling. For less than a second she slipped away in a wash of another's mind — heard a voice calling, "Marshall, Marshall, wake up" — and felt hands pressing each shoulder, not her shoulder, a man's shoulder. She fought back to her reality, to Jesee pacing around behind his desk again, still talking, now standing, back to her, gesturing. She tried to hold on to the words, bring the whole room into focus, but she felt weakened, drained, and she was no match for the steady undertow tugging at her awareness. She began to lose ground again; she could feel her own efforts fading, weakening. In one final

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struggle she closed her eyes to the present, let herself slip a moment while trying to gather strength to fight, and jerked her eyes open, grasping at consciousness with every effort. She saw Shelly leaning over her, calling, "Please, Marshall, wake up." And the shock of being there, being conscious of being in the wrong body was too great — it released her hold on consciousness.

Marshall sat up suddenly and looked at his surroundings. When he was a boy he used to wake like this — abruptly out of dreams whose images were so clear that he couldn't be convinced they weren't real. He was honestly quite grateful to have Shelly there ministering to him; he ought to be paying attention to her, but the dream ... that nightmare. *It was so real. I was in a woman's body — was a woman — and was listening to a man talk about taking a vacation with me, with her, with — And the man had been, yes! that's why he looked so familiar when I first met him! I'd dreamed of Dr. Jefferson — before I met him? That doesn't make sense. Unless....*

"Marshall! Are your all right?" He was surprised by the depth of concern in Dr. Welsh's voice. "I couldn't wake you!"

"I was ... dreaming. I had a nightmare." He was feeling so dazed and disoriented he was aware how childlike he sounded. Her hands on each of his shoulders, Shelly watched him with great concern. Marshall looked up at her and after a moment she let her arms slip around him and held him, crooning soothing words, lending human comfort in an age-old way.

The closeness, the feel of her against him brought him very suddenly out of the grasp of the nightmare and into a different awareness. He let his arms come up around her and after a moment let his hands begin to wander softly up from the small of her back, up her spine, across her shoulders and down, to slip under her arms and forward. As quickly as his mood had changed, she was gone from his arms, standing away from him, arms folded across her chest looking flushed and angry.

"Mr. Hendon."

Marshall was still aroused. He opened his mouth, planning to say something charming and clever, but at the moment felt a sudden wave of dizziness. Something cool touched his forehead and he felt an arm slip under his neck and he heard a voice calling, calling, "Glacia, Glacia, are you all right?" He slipped away and his eyes fluttered open to find himself lying now with his head in the lap of a man, Dr. Jefferson. He tried to struggle away, feeling invaded by contact with the man, but the doctor held him down with little effort, keeping a cloth pressed on his forehead.

The door to the office whooshed aside and Dr. Isakson entered nearly at

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a run. He dropped to his knee, snatched a wrist, and turned it to a glance at the monitor there. With help from Dr. Isakson he felt himself pulled to a sitting position, away from Dr. Jefferson. "Dr. Mitsunaga, are you all right?"

Marshall looked up at him in surprise, and down at the length of his body — a woman's body! Fine boned and nicely padded with flesh at hips and breast! *A beautiful body but I'm in it*, and the shock caused him to black out.

Fran watched the wrist monitor eagerly. Satisfied, he looked directly into familiar ice-blue eyes and called gently, "Glacia," a whisper, "Glacia, you there?"

"Fran! Oh! Fran, I thought I—" But she stopped as she saw his flick to Jesee, warning her away from talking about what had happened.

"I know, it's all right, you're all right now. I'd like to take you back to the lab if you don't mind."

"No, not at all."

Fran looked at Jesee. "Doctor?"

Dr. Jefferson nodded briefly. The two helped Glacia stand. She leaned on Fran while Jesee got a wheelchair.

She was glad to arrive in the lab, to have Fran's arm around her, helping her transfer into her favorite chair. She sat for a moment, palms pressed against her eyes, fingertips massaging her temples, and absorbed in the comfort of Fran's massage of her neck and shoulders. She felt so weak, limbs just a little trembly and emotions frayed to the breaking point. She looked up, moaned, "One more time and I don't think I'll be able to cope, Fran. Honest. I feel if I lose control again I won't have the strength to get back."

"Nonsense, Glazy. He can't be any stronger than you are. He's just come out of stasis, is still recovering from his disorder, has had virtually no sleep. You can hold on, come back when you want to."

She looked up at him, eyes sparkling with tears. "Maybe. Maybe I can, but I don't feel strong enough, I really don't." She palmed the tears away. "I just don't understand what's happening here. I feel like I'm going crazy — split personality or something, I don't know."

Fran rested on the arm of the chair, rubbed her back with one hand. "No, dear. This is something else."

"What? Fran, I can tell you have a theory. What do you think is happening?" He seemed unwilling to reply, staring out the window at the clearing sky. She tried to stand, to face him, but the effort was too great, and her attempt recalled his attention.

"I do have a theory, Glazy, but I don't want to discuss it until I have more ... evidence."

"Evidence? What kind of evidence?"

"More brain wave patterns — yours and his — in your own and each other's bodies." He felt her tense, but rushed on, "And I want to interview each of you."

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"You want me to — voluntarily — let him into my body and go into his? But Fran...." She hid her face in her palms again. This was too much. She was already completely drained of strength. In his pursuit of medical knowledge he was overestimating her capabilities — or underestimating the effects of the mental exchange. She could not — would not — go through it again if she could help it. But how could she help it?

"Glacia, the only way we'll find a way to end this is to discover what's really going on. We can't solve the problem by refusing to look at it. Trust me, dearest. I won't let anything bad happen to you." As he turned away to his computer terminal, she wondered, *How can you prevent anything bad from happening?* But she did trust him, and she knew, also, that he was right; the only way to deal with the situation was to face it square on. He turned again and looked at her.

"All right, Fran. When do we start?"

"After you've had some rest."

"And how will I get rest, if every time I surrender conscious control, he takes over?"

"I've just had a call from Cryogenics asking for a consultation with me. Appears they've been having trouble with Mr. Hendon blacking out." He smiled. "So I'll go down and recommend a strong sedative, so he'll get a sound sleep. Then I'll come up and give the same to you. He still has an appointment with me at three. By then you'll both be rested and ready for the next step."

"All right, then go." After he left she sat staring out the window, trying to remain alert and awake. She watched a lone cloud driven by the wind slide along the horizon. She felt a tug at her mind — Mr. Hendon trying to wake up, no doubt — but refused to let go. She concentrated on the cloud, alone in the vast blue sky. At last she felt the fuzzy feeling go, the pull relaxing and thought that soon Fran would return and she could rest at last, sleep.

The dream was vivid — a reliving of a moment in the past as though it were the present. He walked out of his office and stood surveying the huge room, filled to the point of overcrowding with industrial sewing machines and materials and women at work. The air crackled with dry static and that was a comfort as always, though the new drug they were using on him did seem to be helping, and his bones ached only slightly. He felt good. He rolled up onto the balls of his feet and rocked back down a few times, stretching, feeling calcium buildup along his spine and shoulders knocked loose by the movement. Good. King of all he surveyed. And that girl, there, the third one down in the middle row, was trying not to look at him, he saw. He'd noticed her a few days before, a slender, graceful figure hovering at the edges of

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the crowd during lunches. She was new, he guessed, by her withdrawn, almost fearful air. The work was an unending bore for them, and the girl was afraid of her new boss, as many of them were at first. Well, he could remedy that easily enough, and delightfully so. He signaled to the shift supervisor and asked the old woman to send the girl into his office.

He waited on the couch and when she arrived asked her to shut the door. Apparently she didn't understand English well, because he had to ask twice, the second with a pantomime. Her eyes were wide brown and her skin was dark; just a child, he saw. He asked her to come closer, sensing her fear; he tried to comfort her with a soothing voice and a touch of his hand on hers. He drew her nearer. She did not resist, fear making her body slack. In a moment she was down, sitting on his lap—

—And the dream changed. She was sitting on his lap, looking up into the wise eyes of her father. He was comforting her, telling her it was right and natural that the boys would seek her out more than any other girl in her school. Why, she was beautiful! Didn't she know that? More beautiful, even, than her mother. His fingers combed the black silk of her hair from her face, and he kissed the tear tracks away. You are what every woman wants to be, he said, and what every man wants. Their teasing and their touching may seem awful to you now, angel, but soon, very soon, you'll find you like it, want it. You will have the best of a woman's world when you grow up. You're beautiful, he was saying, and that's all that counts; you need be nothing more. She listened to him and loved him and saw that he loved her. She was just twelve, then, already as busty as girls two years older, and wiser than they about men and sex and even, she thought, fathers. This one looked at her with such tenderness, such love, and all she wanted in the world was to earn that love with more than her beauty, with her mind and her charm and her wit — but he would have none of that. She looked up into those brown eyes and loved him so — she wrapped her arms around him and they held each other tightly—

—And changed again, only this time there was no reliving of the past but a reflection of the present, for Marshall stood looking at Glacia, and Glacia stood facing Marshall, in his mind, seeing him see herself, and he was with Glacia, seeing her see himself. Glacia appeared beautiful, her dark skin and black hair reminding him of the girl-child he'd had on his lap back at the factory. Glacia saw him looking at her as so many men had looked before — the quick once-over and a small smile. She was not surprised by his thought about her. He was surprised by her reaction to him — seeing him as just another trophy hunter, expecting him to feel just exactly as he felt, seeing her. For a moment they stood, a reflection of the present,

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reflections of each other—

The drug released its hold on Glacia promptly at three-fifteen as Fran had planned. She awoke; the first sight she saw was Fran's face, a trace of a practiced smile greeting her. "See?" The smile grew stronger. "Here you are!"

"Hmmmm," she mumbled, "here I am." But grudgingly admitted she did feel better.

As she stretched and lifted her head, she saw Mr. Hendon, apparently asleep, still, on the chair across from her. "Marshall," Fran explained, "Mr. Hendon, that is. I had him brought up while you both slept."

"Hmmm," again, but recovering her good humor, noted, "Didn't you have trouble explaining why you wanted a sleeping patient for biofeedback therapy?"

He backed up, hands wide. "Aw, you know me, Glazy, I can con anyone into anything."

She stood, stretched again and balanced on her toes to face him eye to nose, "Yes, I know. Why else would I be here?" She peered around him at the sleeping — unconscious? — man. "How do we begin this?"

"The dose I gave him is timed to wear off at three-thirty. At that time I want you in alpha. I'd prefer for you to take control and enter his body but ... I don't know how much control you'll have, so if you have to let him slip over into yours, that will do. OK?"

After several hours' sleep the whole situation seemed less frightening, and yet the prospect of being *in there* (she looked at the body of the man) or letting him enter *here* (she was intensely aware of her own body) was still terrifying. Nonetheless, if it would help them to resolve the situation, she would go through with it. "OK."

She returned to her chair. Fran moved to the terminal and worked at the keyboard. "Recording," he said. He called up a side-by-side display of both brain wave tracings, Glacia's and Marshall's. He watched the screen as Glacia stilled her conscious thoughts and forced herself to relax, relax, relax down to no thought, no fears, smooth, quiet, warm. He saw the alpha waves strengthen and emerge as the predominant pattern, saw the reflection of the patterns in Marshall's. By three twenty-eight she was well into the pattern, smooth and rhythmical. Fran felt proud of her for relaxing so well despite her anxiety over the coming exchange and proud of his training of her.

At three-thirty he saw Marshall's pattern emerge — in Marshall. He saw Glacia's patterns strengthen and then Marshall's reappear most strongly coming from Glacia's brain. He thought, *Oh well, she tried,* but at the moment he was going to turn and talk to Marshall — in Glacia's body — something odd happened to the patterns. The two separated tracings altered to match, both brains showing exactly the same pattern, and that pat-

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tern being neither Glacia's nor Marshall's. It was as different, and as similar, from theirs as theirs was from each other's. And he'd seen that pattern before — moments before. He called up the computer's memory on the wave pattern for the hours just past when both people had been in drugged sleep, and there it was. Somehow a third and distinct mentality had emerged. He watched the tracing for several minutes, then, seeing no change, turned and watched his two unconscious patients.

This was no dream. They faced each other and yet each was in two places at once. It was disorienting at first until they realized there were no bodies involved in this exchange except as mental images they held — their minds were free, existing in some place other than that which they knew in daily life. It was dreamlike, this place, this feeling, but no dream. Reality.

Marshall, recalling what he thought was a dream before, when they faced each other like this, tried to hide his attraction to the woman from her. He knew she could see it, as he could see her feeling of revulsion for him. Then he could see her trying to hide her feelings, knew that she couldn't — he couldn't. Neither of them could hide anything from the other or — surprisingly — themselves.

He tried to speak, he formed the word *Well*, and didn't hear its sound but saw it reflected clearly in her awareness. *So it's your body I found myself in*, and he couldn't keep out the undertone of *Nice body*, in the statement. He felt her tired laughter.

Yes, mine. How did you like finding yourself inhabiting the object of your desire?

He felt a sharp lash of irony, turned it back on her, *Probably no better than you'd like finding yourself in a body aroused by the sight of — your body.*

And they found themselves laughing. Glacia was surprised to discover she rather liked this man. She could see very clearly from here his attitude towards women. She had quickly summed him up — he never saw women as intelligent, thinking, feeling beings, but as women's roles — mothers, lovers, wives, and whores. She hated that and wanted to throw it at him. She picked out his feelings for Shelly and threw the images back at him (Shelly as attractive, Shelly as nurturing, Shelly as desiring him) and put beside it her own version of his every meeting with the woman (Shelly the concerned professional, Shelly caught off guard by his sexual reaction to her). But despite his shallow reactions to women, she found she liked him. In this intimate, open place where neither of them could hide their vulnerability or inflate their strengths beyond reality, she found that he was a warm and loving person who had never learned how to reach beyond surface appearances. Because he had never learned, he could never reach anyone, never end his feel-

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ings of loneliness. He had only the ways he had been taught to relieve his loneliness — primarily sexual methods — and they were inadequate. But under that he was — nice, kind, and very hungry for love.

Marshall was hurt by the wave of anger Glacia sent to him. He caught it, all mixed up with his own memories of women, and particularly of Shelly — Dr. Welsh. Then he saw Shelly as a person through Glacia's perception of her and saw how badly, and often, he had misjudged the situation with her. He felt a wash of Glacia's reluctant fondness for him follow the lesson in feminism, some understanding and concern for him. But that first wave of anger still stung. He thought of her reaction to him. *Just another trophy hunter, huh?* He picked out of her memory her feelings about Dr. Jefferson, followed by his view of the man, including his talk with him the day before. He picked out her reaction to him and followed it by her newly discovered sympathy for him. *I'm not the only one who judges by surface appearances. Just because a man reacts to you sexually doesn't mean he's all libido.*

And so they continued for a while, each bringing up the other's pasts until, digging deeper, they reached into each other's lives to their parents and finally — each bruised and hurting — Glacia cried out *Stop! This isn't getting us anywhere. So you've underestimated and mistreated women all your life and I've misjudged men. Throwing all this at each other can be productive only up to a point. Now we're only hurting each other.*

You're right, of course. We should be making peace. What do we do now?

I'm not quite sure. I don't really understand what's going on between us.

Neither do I.

I have a friend, though, whose specialty is in this area — the mind, the brain — he has a theory, he's said. Perhaps he can help.

Who's he? Oh, I see. Well, all right. But how do we get in touch with him from here?

We don't. We wake up.

And they did, simultaneously.

Fran was disconcerted to see both eyes flick open. He checked the computer and noted that the third pattern continued uninterrupted, and prepared himself for the unexpected to happen.

"Hello, Fran." The voice came from both Glacia and Marshall.

"Hello. Glacia?"

"I'm here." But the voice still came from both sides of the room at once. "So is Mr. Hendon."

"I see."

"We'd like you to tell us your theory."

"Well, I'd like to have more—"

"We have facts, Fran. We need your theory. Now."

Fran was having difficulty deciding which person to look at while he and they talked. "Well, all right, then. But

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can you ... separate somehow?"

"Possibly." They consulted silently a moment. "We'll be right back." And both bodies went slack.

Marshall thought, *The only way we can do this is for one of us to give up control for a while. When we recombine, the one left out will have access to the other's memory of what was said.*

Yes. Glacia thought, *He's strong enough now to block me out, prevent me from coming back. If I give in now I may never return.* She saw that he knew it — that if he gave up control, she could as well prevent him from ever regaining control. It wasn't necessary that they talk to Fran from one body but it would be simpler. And there had to be a moment of trust sometime. Glacia examined her own feelings and decided she trusted Marshall to be fair to her more than she trusted herself not to let fear get the better of her so that she'd refuse him entrance forever. *You go.*

Fran, watching the screen, saw Marshall's consciousness return — but into Glacia's body.

"Hello, Fran."

He smiled at "her." "Don't try to fool me, Mr. Hendon."

"I had no intention." He lifted a hand, wiggled the fingers, touched it to a breast. "Interesting. I wanted to try it on."

"Hmm. Well, what have you ... two been up to?"

"A little soul-baring, I guess you'd call it."

"Yes, I guess I would." Fran glanced at the screen for reassurance. Marshall looked and sounded just like Glacia. This was almost as unsettling as having both bodies talk simultaneously. "You want my theory, right?"

"Right."

"It's a tricky business. And only a theory."

"We understand. Please continue, Dr. Isakson."

Fran looked up at him/her, a little startled by the use of his title. He shook his head. "All right, then. Do you believe in reincarnation? That the soul journeys from one life to the next, seeking perfection? No? Well, I always have, and you're the living proof that it's true. You and Glazy. You see, when you were frozen your soul was set free. Eventually it came to be reincarnated in Glacia Mitsunaga's body. When they revived you, your soul was already tied to another body. The soul can't support both consciousnesses at once, so it divided itself between you. But your lives are inextricably intertwined. Each mind's pattern is a part of the soul's weave, so even when one is conscious and the other is unconscious, there is some bleeding over of awareness between you." He looked away, out the window, then at the computer, back to Glacia/Marshall. "It's just a theory but—"

"It fits the facts. Yes. I'll take it back to Glacia." Again, her body relaxed, and Fran saw the third pattern — the soul's, he guessed — re-emerge.

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Glacia welcomed the return. She instantly picked out of Marshall's mind his memory of the brief conversation. *Yes. It fits the facts — and the feelings as well. What do we do?*

What are our options?

We can go through our lives sharing consciousness — I'm not sure we'd be able to keep it up. The emotional strain, not to mention lack of sleep, seems to be very wearing. Or one of us can give up control to the other.

Die, you mean?

Not necessarily. The one who surrenders could go into stasis, like you did, with instructions to be revived when the one who remains dies.

Yes, I see.

You're thinking of your wife.

Yes. This has consequences for all those souls still in stasis but unrevived.

Indeed.

What happens to them if the world finds out about this? People will be unwilling to relinquish control of their minds — they won't allow those frozen to reawaken.

Marshall, what are you suggesting, that we cover this up? Keep it a secret? That can't work!

Why not?

Do you want your wife to have to go through what you did? What about all the others — those frozen and those whose souls reside in bodies now? The plan is to wake hundreds up after the first few successes. We just can't put people through it. Besides, if we hide it, will the next person revived hide it, too?

You're right. What's the solution then?

To let the world know, of course.

And for us?

I don't know. I don't want to share my soul with anyone, not even with you, Marshall.

Nor I. Still, if we accept Fran's theory and the soul goes step by step, striving for perfection, getting closer with each life—

I see what you're thinking. You came first, with problems to work out, problems that were unresolved in the twentieth century. I should let you live your life, work out your problems, then be revived to deal with the next step forward.

You agree!

Surprised you, didn't I? Yes, I do.

Glacia, you can't be serious! I know how hard you've worked to achieve success in your career, in your life. Why would you give all that up?

For the future? To see what's there? Because I believe it will be a better world ... And it ... feels right. I really believe that our problems are interrelated, so that I won't be able to work out mine, till you've had a chance at yours. It may not be the solution for everyone, but I think it's right for me. But for you, there's a problem with the plan.

Yes, I see. Your chronic hypothermia seems to have been caused by my being frozen. I'll be cold for the rest of my life. Do you have energy problems

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in this century? I see not. Then I think I can deal with it. Will you give me control now?

Not so fast. I don't think Fran would believe I volunteered for stasis if you told him. Besides, there are arrangements that will need to be made. It'll take some time. Mind?

No, Glacia. You go. I'll be here when you return.

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It has been some time since we offered a deal with the devil story, and here is one with a most unusual wrinkle, involving a game of monopoly...

Green Roses

BY
LARRY TRITTEN

Fantocinni, in his forty-fourth year, learned all there was to know about pain. Until then his luck had always been unfailingly good, and the worst of times had not been unhappy. There had been only success and pleasure, progress and fulfillment. And then, uncannily, the antithesis of all that eclipsed his happiness. His beautiful wife, having collapsed in Saks while pricing Gucci scarves, arrived too late in the hospital emergency room and drew her final breath on a gurney there, the last words she heard those of a fabulous one-liner by Rodney Dangerfield that filtered in from the TV set in the adjacent waiting room where a small nervous group sat watching the Merv Griffin Show. His lovely daughter, a talented novelist, was found hanging by a typewriter ribbon from a light fixture in her Manhattan penthouse by her agent whose first reaction was to xerox her suicide note on the copy machine in the next room so it could be included in the introduction of her just-finished novel, which was already expected to sell for six figures. His handsome son, a life guard in Santa Monica, had his neck broken by a chiropractor working under the influence of too many margaritas. His best friend hit his collie, Goody, with a Lancia, and the two of them no longer spoke. A mild earthquake, striking Los Angeles early one morning, dropped his air-conditioning business into a canyon, bankrupting him. His home, while he surveyed the ruins of his business, was ransacked by vandals who took his priceless collection of rare coins, two Picassos and four Matisses. And the very next day his maid, Karyn, stabbed him with a nail file when he refused the solace of her caresses. Finally he was laid low with a

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coronary. His funds dwindled. Abruptly he found himself living in a room in downtown Los Angeles, counting his change to see if he could afford a couple of pieces at Chicken Boy, taking muscatel straight from the bottle, and crying into a pillow on those nights when he did not slide into unconsciousness straightaway.

So when the demon appeared, after a month of this, Fantocinni scarcely winced. He was on his mattress staring at the green roses of the wallpaper, a bottle of peach brandy in his lap, the sleeves of his shirt chewed to a frazzle.

The demon, Paco Rabanne (for these creatures named themselves fancifully, this one after a favorite drink of his), evolved slowly from his realm, huffing with the effort of the traverse as he became corporeal before Fantocinni's dazed gaze.

"I paid my rent," Fantocinni said. "Go way."

"Rent." The demon blinked eyes that were as ebony and shiny as a snake's. He was a wizened, yet vaguely elegant reptilian creature in human form. His corpus was of a sequined mosaic hide exquisitely aglitter with a flickering commixture of sea green, turquoise, and ultramarine. He wore Calvin Klein jeans with a lilac butterfly applique on the left rear pocket, a bright yellow silk shirt, and a diadem of broken green glass in a coiffure of writhing garter snakes, all of which grew directly from his skull Medusa-style (though he was badly balding in front where his pate shone smooth as an avocado).

"I'm not here for the rent," he angrily declared.

"Leave me," Fantocinni said, and began to weep.

"Oh" nodded Rabanne. And, "No," shaking his head. "I've been waiting to play Monopoly with you, and I think you're ready now."

"Monopoly?" Fantocinni asked, taking a drink of peach brandy for courage. "What Monopoly? Am I dead or dreaming? *What* are you?"

"I love a good game," said Rabanne. "Now listen hard. Your bad luck, that was just to get your dander up. I'm a real dirty cur. I wiped you out. Be glad I didn't throw in a hernia for good measure. Hah! I hate people. I should have killed your best friend, too...." He paused for a moment. "I'm sort of sorry about the collie, though."

Fantocinni wept inconsolably.

"Life is hard," Rabanne observed with a shrug. "What can I say?"

When Fantocinni had rid himself of all his tears, he unpredictably leapt at Rabanne, taking the demon's throat between surprisingly strong fingers and squeezing heroically, but the throat was simply palpy mushy insubstantial demi-flesh, and he finally gave up, then set to wheezing and weeping anew.

"Rougher than Heartbreak Ridge, eh?" quipped Rabanne. "But, of course, it ain't all that bad, sport...."

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He reached up and began taking things from the other side, producing them in thin air as it were — a nail file, a dog collar, a typewriter ribbon, a sheet of graph paper from a Richter machine, a silver dollar, a patient's bedside progress chart, a bottle of muscatel, and a Gucci scarf. "Is this starting to make sense?" he inquired of Fantocinni.

Fantocinni blinked, shuddered, and tossed the brandy bottle into a corner. "I'm dead," he protested. "I'm dreaming. A nightmare."

"No such luck," said Rabanne. "No. Dreams are subconscious enactments. You are conscious. See!" With this, he poked a monitory forefinger at Fantocinni's gaunt midriff, and Fantocinni, feeling the jab, inhaled fearfully and drew back.

"I was getting very bored," Rabanne said. With one hand he held up a finger, cautioning Fantocinni against interruption. With the other he reached with thumb and forefinger into the air at a point just below Fantocinni's chin and seized something there. He drew a long flat piece of cardboard through the other side, then unfolded it in front of Fantocinni. A Monopoly board. "No one seems to care for this over there," he said. "In any case, it isn't any fun to play without stakes... if you know what I mean." He cast a meaningful glance at the miscellaneous items that had preceded the board.

Fantocinni was by now at least partially sober, and while good sense told him that he was in a dream state or perhaps achieving some fascinating aspect of psychosis, he decided to pay attention to the situation. An ethereal voice whispered some intuitive advice sweetly from the hinterlands of his brain. He listened.

"You want to play this game with me?" he asked Rabanne. "I've crushed nephews, aunts, cousins, wife and offspring" — here pain shimmered his gaze — "friends and strangers alike...."

"So I know," nodded the demon, a gleam of incarnadine light phosphorescing the stare with which he fixed Fantocinni. "Nor have I...."

"You understand," said Rabanne as he fetched an apple box from one corner, dumping out Fantocinni's socks and underwear and setting the box upright between them with the board on it, "that by winning this game you can have it all back — your life, wife, dog, daughter, son, and etc., plus a bonus of longevity, an indefatigable mistress, a few hundred shares of General Motors, and, say, peace in the Middle East. Whatever. If you lose, you get two-hundred bottles of muscatel and an early grave. Do you understand?"

Fantocinni, sitting on the bed across from the demon, who had seated himself comfortably on nothing at all, appraised the board with its familiar plots of property banded with different colors, fixing his attention most specifically on the green of North

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Carolina, Pennsylvania and Pacific Avenues and the lovely blue of Boardwalk and Park Place. He realized with dismay that he was suddenly absolutely sober.

"I'll be the banker," Rabanne said casually, beginning to distribute money. But Fantocinni snorted at this, exclaiming, "No, *I'm* honest." Rabanne gave him a malificent glare, but relinquished the tray of money and property cards, which Fantocinni put beside him on the bed. He counted out the appropriate sums of money for both of them, Rabanne laying his out in the air where they remained as if on a surface.

At this point Fantocinni was pleased to notice that they had a vintage board and the players were colored wooden pawns and the like, rather than the somewhat silly thimble, wheelbarrow, shoe, and similar objects that had replaced them in later years.

Fantocinni chose a purple piece, Rabanne a red one. They rolled the dice to see who would move first, and Rabanne won. "Hah!" he exulted.

Fantocinni, who had not played Monopoly for perhaps a year, was overly cautious at the outset, buying none of the lesser properties as he went around the board, missing the green and the blue in the first two laps. Rabanne, expressionless, picked up St. James Place, Indiana Avenue, and even Baltic Avenue, which Fantocinni considered foolish. Then Rabanne bought Boardwalk and Fantocinni began to sweat. He landed on North Carolina Avenue and bought it, noticing with pleasure that Rabanne was getting low on cash. Then Rabanne bought Park Place, nearly breaking himself in the process. Yet Fantocinni, who suspected that it was very hard to own those two properties and still lose the game, felt his heart go leaden. He was in a panic when Rabanne landed on one of the green properties, Pennsylvania Avenue, but the demon could not afford to buy it to thwart him, and moved on. Icy fingers of sweat tickled Fantocinni's nape.

The game went on. Fantocinni acquired Pennsylvania Avenue, at which point Rabanne said heatedly, "Goddamn you, I'll dine on your heart with a rusty spoon if you get that last one!"

"Shut up and play, soremouth," Fantocinni said coolly.

In time, Rabanne had a house on Boardwalk. Fantocinni felt a chill. He felt dry-mouthed, hollow inside, but didn't even consider a drink. No. He landed on the house and Rabanne hooted and struck his knee with delight. "Blood in your soup," he laughed as Fantocinni handed over two-hundred dollars.

Some time later Fantocinni had the three green properties and a house on each.

The game turned into a slow, relentless grudge fight, a board game version of the Western Front, each player losing money to the other but remaining precariously solvent. Fantocinni saw the board with heightened

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clarity in his fright, his heart pounding rapidly, his head light; and Rabanne began to quite literally sweat blood, grimacing and muttering and fidgeting, alternately glowering with scintillant lacertian eyes at Fantocinni and pondering his moves with the deliberation of a Clausewitz.

Two hours after the game had started, Rabanne was compelled to mortgage Park Place. Fantocinni's stiff hopeful smile maddened him.

Some time later there came a moment when Rabanne, as a result of tossing double sixes, advanced to Pennsylvania Avenue where two green wooden houses had been built; and Fantocinni, staring with hypnotic absorption at the board, had to close his eyes to remain conscious. He opened them in his bed in his West Hollywood home with Lola beside him and the green luminous face of the alarm clock in front of his face. The phone was ringing. Groggily, and irritably, he answered it.

"Dad!" It was Linda's voice. "It sold, the novel *sold* for an advance of two-hundred thousand...."

The rest was lost on Fantocinni, for he had begun to remember things, such as the taste of mortality, the pain of loss, the sickness of alcoholism, and the hard bright wicked smile of a being whose idea of a good time was feeding on human misery and enjoying the suffering as if it were theatre. Abstractedly he told his joyous daughter how happy he was for her, and how proud, and then he was hanging up. He felt his wife stir beside him, and heard her mumble, "What — wazzat...?" She was asleep again quickly, and he got up and went into the kitchen, where he sat at the table, unshaven, with the residue of a hangover clamoring his head. Green roses, he thought, and marveled at the concept. Green roses. Who could possibly have thought of such a thing?

ABOUT THE COVER

This month's cover by top SF artist Don Maitz is titled "The Wizard" and is available in a limited edition print (14½" x 19"). Send $10.00, Plus $2.00 postage and handling, to: Chimera Publishing Co., PO Box 249, Farmington, CT 06032.

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Rudy Rucker's new story imagines a machine that eliminates inertia; and as you might expect, he develops it into a fast-moving and irresistible piece of work. A collection of the author's short stories, THE FIFTY-SEVENTH FRANZ KAFKA, will be published shortly by Berkley.

Inertia

BY

RUDY RUCKER

Nancy was asleep, avoiding me. I was watching TV. A six-inch butler in there making a pitch for textured paper napkins. Texture equals romance. I was clean broke, and my new wife had stopped loving me.

Come on, urges the midget butler, beckoning me into the tube and towards a table. The tablecloth hangs down to the ground like theater curtains. An expectant buzz filters out. I shoulder through the heavy fabric and find myself onstage. A big little audience in here. At last, I have texture, and Nancy's onstage, too, wearing next to nothing and raring to....

The doorbell rang, waking me. 11:30 Friday night, mild mid-September, Princeton, N.J., Nancy asleep beside me, her features all closed up. My unformed bud, my cruel mistress. I went downstairs and answered the door. Harry.

His big white face looked anxious. "I hope I didn't wake you, I just thought I'd, uh...."

"It's O.K. I was under a table putting on a show for some midgets."

Harry's voice dropped. "You were already dreaming?"

"Relax. I'm still dressed. Nancy's asleep." I walked into the kitchen and Harry tagged along. We'd had a drink together that afternoon, and he looked like he'd been at it ever since. I took out two beers and handed him one.

"No thanks," said Harry. He shouldered past me and shambled into the pantry where Nancy kept our liquor supply.

"Tequila, Harry?"

"Uh, yeah. I need."

I should point out that Harry and I were both getting over a series of nasty shocks and unwanted life-changes. Rude chuckles with a negative charge.

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Harry's regular girlfriend had more or less committed suicide, and the next woman he'd loved had rejected him utterly.

I'd gotten married, which seems positive enough, but just then my engineering business had gone down the tubes. "When there's money worries, love goes out the window," my Uncle Arpad told me once. Once you get started fighting it's hard to stop.

My near-bankruptcy had finished Harry right off: he'd been my research and development department. I was still making a little money with consulting, but I had no work at all for Harry. He was making ends meet by teaching high-school physics. Rumpled genius Harry was teaching at the Collegiate Academy for Young Ladies.

"There's only a drop left," Harry observed, holding up the tequila bottle.

"Go on and kill it."

"I better not. Nancy'll be mad at me."

My tidy new wife Nancy, my slobby pal Harry — need I say more? Nancy was going to be mad no matter what.

"Frozen daiquiris!" I proposed. I found a rum-bottle with a few shots left. Harry snagged a vodka bottle, and it was back to the kitchen. Harry leaned against a wall, staring at the ceiling. I got ice and a can of limeade concentrate out of the freezer. *You really shouldn't be doing this,* I thought to myself.

"That's some ceiling," Harry remarked. "The way it's peeling."

It *was* an unusual ceiling. The week after Nancy and I had moved in, the kitchen ceiling paint had blistered and burst in seven places. But it was new paint, so no flakes had fallen. Instead, there were seven irregular blobs of white underpaint surrounded by dangling ruffs of peeled-back tan latex.

"Jellyfish," said Harry. "Invisible space-squid."

I loaded up the blender and pushed the switch. Skazz, skazz, fwrrrr, tik-tik-tik. I sampled it. Fuh. Too much limeade.

Harry read my expression. "You put the whole two-quart size in, idiot?"

I added ice. Skazz, fwrrrr, tik. Pour and pour.

"Too watery." Harry dumped his drink back in and handed me the vodka bottle. My hand tipped a half-pint in. Skazz, fwrr, tik. Perfection.

"I didn't tell you what I've been teaching," Harry said.

"I wasn't sure you wanted to talk about it. Action equals reaction? Voltage equals current times resistence? I'm sorry, Harry, believe me I'm sorry. If I can get my business back on its feet you'll be the first to...."

"It's *interesting* to teach in prep school," Harry said, smiling strangely. "It stimulates my mind in a way that could be most lucrative."

My attention level went up about 15%. "You have a new idea?"

"Are you familiar with Mach's Principle?"

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"Heard of it. It's unproved. Something about absolute space?"

"Mach says there really *is* no space. There's no framework at all without matter. If there were only one object in the universe, then *motion* would be a meaningless concept. No acceleration, no rotation, no inertia."

"Inertia?"

"Inertia is an object's tendency to resist changes in motion." Harry waved his glass. "*Heft* is inertia." The glass flew out of his hand and shattered on the floor. I heard a fluting call from upstairs.

"It's all right, Nancy," I shouted. But already her steps were coming down the stairs, swift and implacable.

"What's that *smell*? What are you *doing*?"

She stood in the kitchen doorway, squinting against the light. She had snub features, bobbed strawberry-blonde hair and a sweet little figure. I loved her with all my heart.

Harry squatted on the floor, picking up bits of broken glass. Seeing him, Nancy stepped back, as if from an open drain.

"Harry just dropped by," I explained. "We're discussing inertia."

"I can see that. You're going to be in horrible condition for the race tomorrow, Joseph." My Christian name. She was unhappy — and who could blame her? I'd promised to run the Princeton Ten-Miler with her.

"What nonsense," put in Harry. "Conspicuous consumption of body-energy. How do you think a black mill-hand feels when he sees you go prancing by in your seventy-dollar air-shoes?" The guy never knew when to shut up.

"You fat ugly toad, I'd like to step on you." With that, Nancy turned and stalked upstairs.

There was a minute's silence. The humming fluorescent light covered everything with stagnant vivacity. The rum hit me. Suddenly the big, lobed paint-peelings on the ceiling looked festive.

"Let's go down to the basement, Harry."

He poured some more vodka into our blenderful. I opened the basement door and the cats rushed out.

Downstairs was my happy place. I'd torn some carpet out of my old office and brought it here, also the desk and file-cabinet. I had a good little computer, a Daisy-wheel printer and, best of all, half a basement full of offbeat tools and components.

It was the first time Harry had been down here. From the old days he knew most of the equipment by serial number, but seeing it all jumbled up different was Christmas for him.

"Jeez, Fletch. There's enough stuff here to build a time-machine!"

"You mean that?"

He gave me a sly look from the corner of his eye. "You got a gyroscope?"

"Sure. Yeah. Got a beauty. Army surplus inertial guidance servo. I've even got a transformer for it. Want to see it run?"

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"In a minute. First things first." He sat down on my desk and, no longer having a glass, took a long gulp from the chill and green and possibly proto-sentient fluid in the Pyrex beaker-top of our blender, a beaker-top, by the way, whose geometry was such that it could not be set down.

"Gimme some."

Blub, chug, blub.

"Ahhhhh. S'good."

Chug, blub, chub, blug. The beaker passed back and forth and was suddenly empty.

"We finished that too fast, Harry. Much too fast."

"I feel pretty damn good, Fletch. I think I can do something with that Mach's principle. The point is that gravitational mass and inertia are not the same thing. Gravity is like a *charge*, but inertia is a type of *interrelatedness*."

"You're going to build a time-machine?"

"Get your mind out of the gutter, Fletcher. I'm going to build an inertia-winder."

I assumed he was putting me on. "Why not smelt up some Cavorite instead? You know what I mean? That Jules Verne alloy that was supposed to shield things from gravitational attraction? Or maybe we should put together a Dean Drive and mail it to John Campbell. The gyro'd come in handy."

"Campbell's dead, more's the pity." Harry sucked a last drop out of the beaker and smacked his lips. "I'm commencin' to feel *pret*-ty damn good."

"You learn to talk that way at the prep-school?"

"The Collegiate Academy. Oh, my, yes. Those sweet girls. Bless their hearts. The cardioid curve, dear Fletcher, is, of course, a traditional symbol for pulchritudinous callipygosity, and when I speak of blessing, I think, *selbstverstandlich*, of the censer and thurible, the spray of holy anointment, and the fullness of emotion appropriate to such...."

Maundering on in such fashion, Harry drifted over to my equipment and began hefting this object and now that. Suddenly I didn't feel so good. I decided to leave him on his own and check out Nancy.

She was pacing up and down the upstairs hall. Seeing her, the moment before she started talking, I knew again why I loved her. Her grace, her aliveness, the way she moved.

"Dammit, Joseph, what do you think you're doing?"

"Nancy, I was *asleep*. And Harry showed up, so I let him in. He's my buddy."

"You smell like a distillery. Talking to him's fine, but do you have to drink like him? You're not built for it."

A wave of dizziness hit me then. I grabbed the bannister for support. Nancy spotted the move.

"Are you going to throw up, Joe? Are you all right?"

I felt a sickening lightness in my stomach. We'd drunk that stuff much

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too fast. Inertia. A giant's fist clenched my Adam's apple. Nancy helped me into the bathroom.

When I was through being sick, she wiped my face off with a washcloth and laid me down on our bed.

"Poor Joey. Poor baby."

"You don't really love me."

"You don't love *me*."

"I do love you."

"I love you, too, Joey. I love you a lot."

It was good in bed. Sleep came.

I woke suddenly in the dark, feeling queasy. Three, four in the morning? My mouth was an agony of salt and mucus. Water, I needed water, lots of it. Aspirin. The toilet.

Painfully I eased up onto one elbow. For some reason my body rocked so far forward that my head bumped my knees. I was as wobbly as a Macy's parade turkey float. I definitely had to get to the bathroom. I creaked into a sitting position and swung my legs out of bed. Inexplicably, my legs took off across the room, dragging my body behind. WHAM, I crashed into an armchair, SLAM, I hit the floor, CRASH, I bounced across the room. My arms and legs were flying around like styrofoam cups in a wind-storm. Yet none of it really hurt. With sudden sick horror, I decided that I'd suffered some kind of brain damage. I was having a seizure for sure.

Just then there was a scream, and Nancy came bashing into me. I reached out to grab her, but the force of my touch flicked her away like a ping-pong ball. The objects she smashed into took off on their own random trajectories, and now our whole room was filled with dark, crazy bouncing. This was more than brain damage, this was a major breakdown of physical law. What....

I remembered Harry. *I'm going to build an inertia-winder.* I rose abruptly to my feet. Error. I ricochetted from the ceiling to our bed. I struck the bed at an awkward angle, and its springs catapulted me out our bedroom's open French windows. I was travelling much faster than seemed at all reasonable. Our second-story porch shot under me, and an instant later I'd crashed. My fall was fortunately broken by the large Spirea bush that I landed on.

For a long minute I just lay there, assessing the damages. As far as I could feel, nothing was broken. Really, I hardly even felt bruised. The night air was mild and pleasant. From where I lay, I could see the lit-up windows of our basement. Harry was down there. Harry had made this happen. But how? Something to do with inertia. He's taken my inertia away, and now my body could be pushed around like a dandelion seed. But if I didn't weigh anything, why had I crashed to the ground so hard? And why hadn't it hurt?

It didn't matter. Right now the only thing that mattered was to go down to the basement and wring Harry's neck. Slowly, slowly, I eased myself into an

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upright position. I felt as unsteady as a six-foot pile of plates. When I tried to step forward my center of gravity shifted and I fell back down. Great progress: an inch per minute.

I decided to take my chances and leap.

Once again, I overdid it. The two stories of our house whizzed past, and then I was looking down at our streetlit roof. Looking down at the roof and still climbing. Although I was getting frighteningly high, I wasn't too worried about it. My body had so little inertia that my legs would easily be able to absorb the shock of landing.

Slowly, not wanting to throw myself into a spin, I leaned my head back to look up at the sky. Nothing. There was nothing up there. Low clouds? Not likely, clouds would be reflecting some of the city lights back down at us. But tonight had been a full moon, the Harvest moon, I'd seen it rising earlier when....

Suddenly I could see the moon and stars again. I was high, high in the sky. Forgetting to move slowly, I looked back down. Despite my abrupt head-movement, I didn't start spinning. The influence of the rest of the universe was acting on me again, and my inertia was back.

Below my feet was a huge black dome, the region that Harry had somehow cut off from the world. It was expanding. The air up here felt thick again. It had inertia, it dragged and beat against me. Rapidly my upward motion slowed, and then I was falling, falling heavily. I prayed that Harry wouldn't pick this instant to turn his inertia winder off.

As I tumbled back through the dark dome my speed increased dramatically. The gravitational mass of my body was the same, so that the gravity of Earth pulled me as hard as ever. Yet in here my inertial mass, the mass which resists motion, was almost zero. The trees, the streetlight, my house streaked past. I tensed my bent legs against the crash.

At just the moment of impact I pushed up, neutralizing the shock. When someone jumps off a building, it's not the *falling* that kills them, it's the *sudden stop*. But with virtually no inertia to resist changes of motion, a sudden transition from over 100 mph to complete rest is only mildly jarring.

The whole leap had taken less than a minute. I found myself right next to the cellar door outside my house. Now that I had a better understanding of what was going on, I was able without too much difficulty to get one of the big doors open and go on down into the basement.

"HELLO, FLETCHER!"

My inertia eardrum vibrated wildly with Harry's greeting. He was comfortably seated in my desk-chair. I must have jerked an arm involuntarily, for I found myself on the floor again. Glaring fixedly at Harry, I crawled towards him, close enough to reach out and....

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"AREN'T YOU HAPPY?"

This time I was braced for it.

"Whisper, Harry, whisper." Maybe it wasn't really *that* loud, maybe it was the hangover. There's no hangover worse than the one you have when you wake up at four AM. I wondered what Nancy was doing now. I hoped she had the sense to just get back in bed. For some reason, thinking about her didn't make me feel tense like it usually did. She was, after all, just another person, a person just like me....

"I DID IT!"

"You did it." Gingerly I rose to my feet. "Please don't talk loud or I'll have to kill you. Did what?"

"Come see." Moving with the caution of an arthritic eighty-year-old on glare-ice, Harry eased out of my chair and led me back to the workshop area. Sitting in a cleared part of the floor was the inertia-winder.

It was basically just an electric gyroscope with a glob of something attached to the protruding rotor. Wound-up inertia?

"Quarkonium," breathed Harry. "I kept some back from the last shipment. It's a cross between matter and antimatter. Last week I ran it through some high-energy vacuum-sputtering to build up a fractal surface-geometry. A lot of the quark pairs are split up now. Once I had that going for me, I just needed a gyro to spin them around."

"You could have warned me."

"I didn't know you were going to rush back upstairs. How about another drink?"

"No way. Turn that thing off now, before someone gets hurt. I was outside and I could see the sphere of influence growing. It's just our house now, but if you let it go much longer it'll be the neighbors too. I could get sued."

Harry looked acutely uncomfortable, but said nothing.

"Alright then, I'll turn it off myself." I leaned forward, fell down, righted myself on all fours, found the cord of the electric gyro, and yanked at it. The plug flew at me and bounced off my forehead. Harry had already unplugged it. I kicked at the gyro. The compassless rotor bobbed this way and that. The faint whine of its spinning diminished not one whit.

"The quarkonium's surface is very ... adhesive," Harry murmured. "The field-lines of inertia are all wrapped around it. It has a lot of inertia and it keeps getting more."

"So when does it run down?"

"I ... I don't think it ever will. It's self-perpetuating."

"Come *on*, Harry. What about the Second Law of Thermodynamics?"

"This is different, Fletch. This is quarkonium."

There was a sledge-hammer over in the corner of the basement. I went and got it. It was amazingly easy to heft. I took a good solid stance in front of the gyro and let fly. The gyro skittered a few feet across the floor and I fell down. All right. I hadn't expected to

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succeed on the first try. I kept at it for about ten minutes. Harry watched in silence.

Finally a lucky blow cracked the gyro mount. The rotor snapped free, rolled around on the floor, then spun up onto one end. The shiny glob of wound-up inertia spun there like a child's top. All that hammering had accomplished exactly nothing.

I let my arms and legs go limp. Gravity bounced me around on the floor for a while. I lay there. Harry stood over me, looking worried. With a quick, savage blow, I knocked his legs out from under him. Gravity bounced him around for awhile. Then he was lying next to me.

I closed my eyes, imagining a black sphere of inertialessness. The sphere grew and grew. Soon it included the whole Earth. Chaos. The sphere kept growing. After awhile it included the Moon. Without its inertia, the Moon would fall down. Without any heft fighting our gravity, we'd reel the Moon in like a poisoned catfish. Eventually ... if anyone still cared ... we'd both fall into the Sun.

The whine of the spinning quarkonium blob seemed to have gotten higher. The thing was actually speeding up. How long did we have? Ten hours? Ten days?

"JOEY! WHERE ARE YOU?" The distress-cry of my mate.

I leaped to my feet shouting, "I'M COMING DARLING!" Error. I smashed the naked lightbulb on the ceiling with the nape of my neck. I bounced into a shelf full of radio tubes. I landed right on top of the inertia-winder. For a horrible moment the inertia-wrapped glob of quarkonium spun right against my cheek. It felt silky and sly as a vampire's first kiss.

The light in the stairwell snapped on and there was Nancy.

"What is it, Joey? Why don't we weigh anything? I keep falling and...." She tumbled down the stairs and came to rest next to me and Harry and the inertia-winder. A square of light from the staircase spot-lit us like three degenerates in a Tennessee Williams play.

"Harry built this machine?"

"That's right, Nancy." Harry was actually trying to sound friendly. I think he realized, as I had, that we'd all be dead soon. I took Nancy's hand.

"Why are you just lying here? Why don't you turn the machine off?"

"We can't."

"Well, what exactly is it doing?"

"It cuts us off from the rest of the world's inertia influences," said Harry. "You know what inertia is?"

"It's you and Joey getting drunk again for no reason. It's Joey and me fighting just because we fought yesterday. It's you and me not liking each other because the other one doesn't like us." Nancy paused, considering what she'd just said.

"That's all true, Nancy. And in physics inertia is an object's tendency to resist changes in its motion. Inertia

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is an over-all property of the universe. We only have inertia because of the stars."

"You mean like the zodiac influences your moods?"

"Well ... maybe. But I'm talking physics. This thing I put together," Harry gestured at the inertia-winder. "This thing produces an expanding shell of unconfined quarks. Wherever the shell crosses inertial field-lines, the lines snap. It's snapping more and more field-lines all the time. Soon the whole block will have no inertia, then all of Princeton, then the whole state and the world and then...."

"How long, Harry?" My voice was husky and brittle.

"Well, you're asking me to solve a non-linear partial differential equation there..." Harry hummed a distracted snatch of verse. "...fine-structure constant ... hyperbolic tangent of that ... oh, call it 26.34 hours. Give or take."

"Until what?" demanded Nancy.

"Until the Moon loses all its inertia," I said. "When that happens it falls down."

"But why would it fall if it doesn't weigh anything?"

"There's inertia and there's gravitational mass," said Harry patiently. "This doesn't change gravitational attraction. It just takes away the ability to *resist* gravitational attraction."

"DAMMIT HARRY!" The force of the accompanying gesture threw Nancy against me. "Goddammit, Harry, what'd you build it for?"

"It would have wonderful applications," I said placatingly, "if we could just turn it off. Like a jet-liner. Get rid of its inertia for awhile and you could launch it with a rubber band. Or you could use an inertia-winder for real cheap energy generation. Accelerate something when it's inertialess, then let it have its inertia back and take advantage of the free momentum. If there were a way to turn it off we'd be rich instead of dead."

The spinning glob on the rotor was the size of a softball now. Nancy reached out a finger to touch it. "Ugh! It's so soft and ... greedy feeling."

"What did you just say?" asked Harry.

"Soft. Greedy feeling."

"That's the broken quark-bags. But I meant Fletch. What did you say, Fletcher?"

"You could accelerate something inside the inertialess sphere and when it got out it's have a lot of momentum."

"*Pret*-ty damn good. Call the Kennedy Center."

"What for? Tickets to the ballet?"

"*Space* Center. We'll put this sucker on a Saturn rocket and let the Crab Nebula worry about it."

"Sure, Crab Nebula. You'll be lucky to find a rocket that moves faster than the black sphere is expanding."

"The change-up, Fletcher. When the rocket exhaust gets to the edge of the sphere it gets a sudden increase in momentum. The same speed but a lot

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more inertia. Action equals reaction. Momentum down means momentum up. It'll kick the whole sphere like a mule. I don't see why...," Distracted humming again. "Yes. The system should reach nine-tenths the speed of light at ... 47 minutes after launch. We'll lose part of the night sky but what the hell. It beats having the Moon land on your head. Call Max Moritz."

General Moritz was a guy we'd done some ordnance development for a few years back. A Pentagon big-wig. "All right. I'll call him."

"Where does he live?" Nancy wanted to know.

"Right in D.C. Georgetown."

"Do you think the sphere has reached there yet?"

"I doubt it. What's the difference? The telephone'll work. It's just electrons moving down a wire. If your husband can move through the sphere, then so can an electron."

"The phone *won't* work," I insisted. "Except for local calls. Long-distance is all by microwave these days. There's something about your expanding quark sphere that blocks electromagnetic radiation. That's why you can't tell if the sun's up yet."

"Even if you could call Moritz, he wouldn't believe you yet," added Nancy. "He still has his stubbornness."

"Not stubbornness, Nancy. *Inertia.*"

"This is more than just physics." Her voice was light and amused. "People keep acting the same way because other people are watching them. You get trapped into acting out the role that society assigns you. It's the same with matter. If all the stars and galaxies say, 'Well, so and so is sitting right *there*,' then it's really hard to move over *here*. Peer pressure. It's inertia. But now we're all covered up together. Like kids hiding under a blanket. None of the big people know what we're doing." She put her arms around me and gave me a wet kiss. "Come on, Harry, you kiss on me too."

"I'd better not. You two just go on and enjoy yourselves. I'm going upstairs to call Max."

Harry banged around upstairs for awhile. Then he was talking to someone, an operator. Nancy and I ignored him. We were enjoying ourselves. The only fly in the ointment was that I kept imagining that I saw people out of the corner of my eye, glowing people like elves and fairies. That was just the alcohol abuse acting up on me. But making love with no inertia was fantastic, so....

"Ahem."

"Are you already back, Harry? Can't you see...."

"You were right about the phone. I think we better go see Moritz in person."

I sat up and straightened my clothes. "What?"

"Didn't you say you could jump real high? We'll walk to Washington in seven-league boots!"

"What if we move too fast and

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land outside the sphere? If we landed from one of those jumps with all our inertia along it'd be like falling out of an airplane. Certain death."

"We'll carry the inertia-winder with us. We'll need it to show Moritz anyway."

Well ... why not. I began looking around for something to carry the spinning inertia-winder in.

"I'm coming, too," said Nancy, standing up carefully.

"Aw, Nancy...."

"*Yes,* I'm coming."

My Nancy. "O.K., honey. You come too. Maybe we can see some sights in D.C. Be sure to bring your checkbook if we need to get the bus back. And what should I carry the inertia-winder in?"

"How about your old lunch-box? That you used to use when you had an office to go to."

"Good idea." I found the old gray lunch-box in the corner of the basement and nudged the inertia-winder on in. It sat on the bottom of the box, spinning like a top, making a whining buzz against the metal. I hoped it wouldn't drill its way through.

"Let me get us some sweaters," suggested Nancy. "Even though it's warm, we might get cold flying through the air."

The trip got off to a good start. The three of us went out in the back yard, linked arms, and took off like superheroes. I'd never jumped harder in my life. It felt like we were going a thousand miles an hour. A limp wind whistled past us as we rose up and up and up. I held my shrilly buzzing lunch-box clutched in one hand. With the winder right with us, there was no danger of leaving the region of no inertia. We continued to rise. The whole suburban sprawl of Princeton was just a dotty smear of light, far, far below.

"Joey!" Nancy was worried. "We shouldn't have jumped so hard! What's going to happen when we land? And we're still climbing!"

All at once the ground was invisible. As far as I could make out, we were passing through some clouds. A very unpleasant thought crossed my mind. What if we kept climbing indefinitely? What if the force of our combined jump had been enough to zap us up to escape velocity? As long as we stayed inside the sphere, there was virtually no wind-resistence to slow us down. Earth's gravity was pulling at us all the time, slowly chipping away at our velocity, yet the turnaround point was nowhere in sight. We were going to rise and rise until we either froze to death or asphyxiated. The air streaming past me felt cold and thin as icepicks.

"Drop it, Fletch," said Harry. His thoughts were, as usual, a step ahead of mine. "Drop the inertia-winder so we can get out of its sphere of influence and have the wind slow us down."

I dropped my lunch-box, or tried

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to. At first it just hung there in front of me, buzzing like some giant horse-fly. Finally I took hold of it and threw it down past my feet. The other two hung onto me as the recoil pushed us yet higher. The air was really getting cold now. With the clouds below and the black sphere's boundary still above, it was utterly dark. Nancy began sobbing.

Just then we broke out into blinding sunlight. We were so high that the sky overhead was dark purple instead of blue. A terrifying immense dome of black curved down away from us, cutting the Earth's spread-out surface in a vast circle. Out past it I could see the wrinkled surface of the sea, the vast expanse of the Chesapeake Bay. With any luck we'd be landing right in Washington.

"It's beautiful," gasped Nancy.

The air was so thin that we had to pant rapidly to keep from blacking out. But it was thick enough to stop our flight. Earth's big gravity took over and we began to fall.

"Just remember how Superman lands in the movies," I advised Nancy. "Keep your legs bent and push up as you hit." Then the lovely sunlight was gone again.

Once we'd fallen back through the clouds we could make out the spread-out street-lights of Washington and its suburbs. The Potomac River's black swath made a convenient landmark. Harry craned this way and that, trying to orient himself. Finally he pointed one of his stubby arms.

"That's Georgetown over there."

"The Pentagon would be better," I suggested. "I'm sure General Moritz is over there by now. The Army's going to be in a state of Red Alert wondering what happened. The whole city is without inertia. Let's just hope they don't start shooting missiles at the Russians."

"They couldn't if they wanted to," Harry observed. "No radio-links."

We were falling faster than ever. Here and there I could see other people flying through the air. Some of them looked very strange ... not even like people, really. There was one in particular, a small man who glowed green all over. I tried to point him out to Nancy, but then he was gone. Probably just my imagination. A complex sound drifted up from the city, a generalized roar compounded of screams, sirens and horns.

"You all better decide where to land," said Nancy. "Or we're going to end up in the river."

Indeed, the Potomac was directly beneath us, and getting closer all the time. "The Pentagon," I urged, "over there to the right. We should throw something to the left to push us that way."

"My shoes," offered Harry. Hanging onto me with his left arm, he reached down with his right to slip off his loafers, then threw them one, two, off to our left. This was enough. We streaked down towards a strip of park at the river's edge.

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The landing was easy, but the one-mile walk to the Pentagon was a bit harder. Without inertia it's impossible to walk normally, yet we were loath to try another big jump. Finally Nancy hit on a sort of modified bunny-hop. Harry and I hopped along after her.

The George Washington Parkway was an incredible scene. Some people were still trying to drive. Their cars jerked around like in a speeded up stop-action movie. From zero to a hundred and back to zero in three seconds. The vehicles kept crashing into each other like bumper cars, but no one was getting hurt.

Fortunately, Harry still had General Moritz's private phone number, and we were able to get in past the guards without too much trouble. A half-hour after we'd landed, we were down in the Pentagon's nerve center: the Situation Room.

A huge wall-map of the world dominated the room. Built-in electronic graphics had shaded a large gray circle around D.C. To the south it took in most of Virginia, and to the north it had just reached New York City.

"Harry," called a man's high, choky voice. "Fletcher."

It was General Moritz. He was seated with the other brass, at a long oak table. Nancy, Harry and I shuffled closer.

Max Moritz was a plump Pennsylvania Dutchman who wore his blond hair combed straight back from the forehead. His cheeks were chubby and his eyes a merry Delft-blue. For him war was fun. He had the cheerful viciousness of a child who likes to torture animals. Harry and I had endeared ourselves to him a few years back when we'd invented a way to make water radioactive by shining a special beam at it. Moritz was still hoping for a chance to try it out.

"Is this true that you have caused the big black-out?" yodelled the general. He always sounded like he was swallowing something. "By thunder, I'm hoping so!"

"Yes, it's true," I said. "Harry made something called an inertia-winder. It snaps our ties to the rest of the universe. Inertia field-lines are broken, and electromagnetic radiation is blocked as well. The problem...."

"We need a rocket," said Harry. "We have to get the inertia-winder on a rocket right away."

"To send at the Russians?" chortled Moritz. "If only we could. But these politicians are such cautious snails. I can ask permission, but...."

"Not to send at the Russians," I broke in. "To send to outer space. The inertia-winder's sphere of influence is growing. We are unable to stop it. Within twenty hours, its influence will reach the Moon. With no centrifugal force of inertia, the Moon will fall down and smash our whole planet. The only solution is to send the inertia-winder away from our solar system."

For the first time Moritz looked really worried. "Are you sure you can

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rocket the thing away faster than its sphere of influence is growing?"

"The rocket will have the advantage of taking off with virtually no air-resistance to fight," said Harry, tapping one hand with his broad forefinger. "Moreover there will be a fantastic gain of momentum for each particle which leaves the sphere of...."

"What happens when this thing gets to some other solar system?" protested Moritz. "What if we destroy the home of some powerful alien race? What vengeance might they wreak?"

"You're talking about thousands of years from now," said Harry airily. "By then we'll think of something. Hell, if I can just get the bugs worked out, Fletcher and I can fly out to turn off the inertia-winder by next year."

There was a sudden, earth-shaking crash. Then another and another. Moritz snatched up a red telephone, his face a mask of fierce excitement. "Is this the Russians? Shall we retaliate?"

The answer he heard seemed not to be to his liking. A few moments later he'd slammed the receiver down, bouncing a little from the motion. "It's our satellites," he said. "They're starting to fall down. I'm going to have to back your plan to send your furshlugginer inertia-winder into space. But God help you boys if you don't make good on your promise to go out and turn it off by next year."

"Next year" has a way of rolling around a little sooner than you expect. Nine months after that eventful September day when we'd built and launched the inertia-winder, Harry and I were rocketing after it, strapped into a spaceship of our own design. And Nancy? I'd lost her over Christmas. She'd gone to visit her sister down South, and it didn't look like she was ever coming back. In mid-February Harry had moved in with me and we'd been hard at work ever since. I'd meant to go after Nancy, but somehow I hadn't gotten around to it. And now I was racing out of the plane of the Solar System at about .95 the speed of light.

Our spaceship was unconventional, to say the least. It was, basically, a big old Ford station-wagon ... with a few modifications. Why a Ford? Because Harry's mother had one that she didn't need much anymore.

We'd torn out the tailgate and rear-window and replaced them with an air-lock just big enough to cycle us through one at a time. We'd beefed up the windshield with a transparent slab of titaniplast, hoisted out the engine, and packed the life-support unit in under the hood. The actual rocket-drive was mounted down where the transmission had been, with nozzles pointing out like dual exhausts. To finish the ship off, we'd sprayed everything but the windshield and rocket-nozzles with airtight urethane foam, and then coated that with a skin of reflective Mylar. It was hell of a vehicle.

The secret of our rocket drive was

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that Harry had finally perfected the inertia-winder. He'd found a way to turn it on and off, and even better, a way to keep the black sphere of influence from growing indefinitely. To move our ship we needed only to surround ourselves with a five-meter sphere of inertialessness and shoot matter out of our rocket-nozzles. Under inertialess conditions, it was easy to accelerate the matter with an electromagnetic mass-driver; and whenever matter left the black sphere of inertialessness, it gave us a fantastic push forward.

The two major factors limiting our range were, firstly, how much matter we could bring along with us for the mass-driver to throw out, and, secondly, how much power we could store to run the mass-driver. We beat the matter-storage problem by using powdered neutronium, a sort of degenerate matter massing about 100 kilos per dust-speck. And we handled the energy-storage by using a power-pack based on unconfined quark-antiquark pairs. The things held a charge big enough to run New York City for months. With the runaway inertia-winder's head start it was going to take us awhile to catch it.

So as far as rocket power went we were in pretty good shape. Air and food were O.K. too: we had a nice culture of DNA-doctored slime-mold growing under the hood. The stuff absorbed carbon-dioxide, gave off oxygen, and tasted more or less like tuna-fish. All it asked in return was our waste, and a steady supply of heat from the power-pack.

Physically we were all set for the trip of up to a year of our time, which could come to something like three or four years Earth-time, taking relativistic time-dilation into account. Physically we were all set, but mentally, well ... imagine a months-long car-trip with no view, no change in diet, no chance to stretch your legs, and with Harry Gerber in the car with you. Or with Joseph Fletcher, for that matter.

"Harry," I whined. "Let's turn the drive off for awhile again. I've got to *see*." The bad thing about our drive was that when it was on, we were cut off from the rest of the universe by our inertia-winder's five-meter black sphere. According to the Ford's dashboard calendar-clock this was our ninety-third day out. We'd had the drive on for the last ten days solid. Sitting behind the steering wheel and staring out through the windshield I could see nothing but our ship's shiny hood faintly reflecting our small ceiling light.

"We really ought to keep accelerating," said Harry testily. He was behind me, floating there in the wagon's roomy rear. "The sooner we catch up, the sooner we can go home. And you shouldn't be talking to me anyway. It's my turn to sleep."

"I don't care, I don't care, I don't care!" I slapped the gearshift from *Drive* to *Neutral*. The mass-driver's irritating whine stopped instantly, and

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moments later the inertia-winder stopped too.

Harry surged forward, as eager as I to look out the window. His knee caught my head a nasty jolt.

"You stupid stinking slob," I hissed through clenched teeth. I didn't bother to turn my head to glare at him. The view was too important to me.

The view. When I was little my parents used to take us to visit some friends in Georgia. They lived on the Savannah River, with a dock going out into it. Nights we'd sit there, all of us, the big people smoking and talking, and we kids staring up at the sky. That was the most stars I'd ever seen till this trip. And now, oh now, great skeins and marbled streamers of light, so living, so static. I loved to look at it, to let my mind flow out of our cramped quarters, flow out into the All.

Dead ahead of us was a black disk the size of your fist at arm's length. That's where we were going, that was the sphere of influence of the inertia-winder we'd launched in September.

"Look how big it is," I said to Harry after awhile. "Twice as big as the last time we looked. We're gaining fast."

"Or it's growing fast."

"You stupid stinking slob."

"That's twice, Fletcher." Something is Harry's voice compelled me to look over at the too-familiar features. It was not a pleasant sight.

"Harry, don't look at me that way."

"*That's twice.* You know where that line comes from? It's a joke my grandfather used to tell. It goes like this, it's an old-time story. A man and a woman had just gotten married. They got into a rented horse-and-buggy and started out on their honeymoon trip, the man holding the reins. It was a wet day and there were puddles in the road. The horse shied at one particularly large puddle, and the bridegroom had to get down and lead the animal through the puddle. '*That's once,*' he said to the horse as he remounted the driver's seat. Well, pretty soon there came another large puddle. Once again...."

Garbage. I stopped listening and let my mind flow back out that window. The runaway inertia-winder was still far off. After we shut it down, we'd still have to fly all the way back. And for what? By rights we should be back on Earth marketing our new rocket-drive ... not that Harry was able to explain how to build one. Even more important, I should be back there wooing Nancy. Now that the excitement of the rocket-building was over, I missed her more every day.

"...stopped at a third puddle," Harry was saying. " '*That's three times,*' cried the bridegroom, and then he took out a pistol and shot the horse dead. 'I don't think you should have done that,' says the bride, and the man says, '*That's once!*' "

"Are you trying to threaten me, Harry? You're a stupid stinking slob. That's three times. Like it or lump it

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and shut the goddamn hell up while I'm enjoying the view." Trembling with some mad rage I'd never known, I awaited his reaction.

Like a fool, he went for my neck. That was just what I'd been expecting, and I blocked his lunge with my forearm. But I hadn't realized that Harry had a knife in his right hand. It cut deeply into my flesh.

Bright globs of my blood shot out and danced. Almost immediately, Harry showed signs of remorse. He dropped his knife and tried to stanch my blood's flow, pressing his dirty handkerchief onto the incision.

Well all right, I'd asked for it. Typical event on a long two-man probe. But then, all at once, it got a lot worse. A glob of my blood drifted into our toilet-vent, a louvered oval in the center of the dash. The vent channeled right to the superslime, our food, our air, our good buddy, a DNA-doctored mutant tissue with no FDA approval. My blood went in the vent, the superslime tasted it, found it good, and wanted more, *more, MORE.*

There we were in the front seat of our Ford station-wagon, me behind the wheel, and Harry bent over my slashed wrist, an instant poised just right *there,* and then a thick gout, a thick nasty gout of hungry superslime reared out of the toilet-vent all reach and menace. The slime's distributive, ambiguous, non-FDA brain had realized a basic truth: People Are Food.

More and more of the thick, mucous-like slime came oozing out of the vent. A pseudopod the size of a man's arm waved about, feeling for flesh. Harry shrank from it, trying to scoot back over the seat. But the lax tentacle stretched out to block his escape-route. The stuff was stalking him — I guess he smelled stronger than I.

Quickly I tied Harry's handerchief around my wrist, making a sort of tourniquet, and then I slipped over the seat and into the station-wagon's rear. If I could just get to the laser in time! We hadn't planned to use it till later, and it was packed in under a lot of other....

"Help me, Fletcher! For the love of God, help me!"

For some twisted reason I found Harry's cries amusing.

"*That's twice,*" I called, in a voice shaking with laughter. "That's twice, Harry. And you didn't say please."

"Please help me! It's all over my leg and it's oozing some kind of acid on me, Oh God it burns, Fletcher, it's *digesting* me!"

There was the laser. I snatched it up and leaned into the front seat. The slime had woven a sort of wet cage all around Harry, a cage of thick green ropes dripping hydrochloric acid. Harry had his knees drawn up and his arms wrapped around his head. A piece of the slime was plastered against his left leg. Faint wisps of smoke drifted up from this spot as the acid ate away at Harry's baggy pants.

Moving quickly, I lasered through

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the slime-rope that fed out of the toilet-vent, and then I snapped the vent's louver shut. Cut off from the main body-mass, the slime tendrils around Harry lost their purposefulness and simply flopped down over him. The acid-secretions stopped as well, and we were able to scrape the stuff off without too much pain. Harry was unharmed, except for an ugly red burn on his thigh. My wounded wrist began to throb as the adrenalin faded.

"Here," said Harry, fumbling open the glove compartment. "Here's the first-aid kit. Let me bandage your wrist for you."

"Oh no, Harry. Let me fix your burn first."

We looked at each other and burst out laughing. Suddenly I felt better than I'd felt all month.

"I'll turn the drive back on."

"Good. Open it up all the way and we'll catch that sucker by next week." Harry's voice was a little muffled. He was chewing a mouthful of the slime.

Our last week of pursuit went by pretty quickly. Harry amused himself by putting together a little Zeeman catastrophe-machine out of rubber-bands and paper clips. The effect was that if you moved one of the paper-clips around the contraption, it felt like there was a complex folded set of forces acting on the clip. At one spot, in particular, the clip would always give a sudden jerk. That was supposed to be a "catastrophe," in the sense of "abrupt and unpredictable change." Harry claimed that if you called one direction "Fear" and the other direction "Rage," then that little twitch of the paper-clip symbolized what he'd been feeling when he pulled the knife on me. I let him talk, and spent most of my time programming some video-games onto our computer.

As we approached the runaway inertia-winder's black sphere we turned our drive off more and more often to check our progress. It was important to line ourselves up so we'd be heading right towards the center. Once we were inside our drive wouldn't be nearly as powerful.

Day by day the sphere grew, blotting out the distant stars. Soon we could see nothing else. We blasted the rockets for twelve more hours, cut power, and coasted towards the interface. We wanted to be able to get a fix on the other rocket as soon as we entered its sphere of influence.

"How will we know when we're inside?" I asked Harry.

"You'll feel your inertia go away again. And our radar'll pick up the other rocket. And maybe...."

Just then I felt a little twitch, a space-ripple running the length of our ship. A strange twinkling filled the space ahead of us.

Before I could say anything, the speaker on our radio crackled into life. "Greetings, masslings. Hail the dearth!" The voice was high and staticky, almost a random whistle. "Hail the dearth!" chimed in more of the lit-

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tle voices. "And slideways fro!"

Something slapped into our windshield then, something green-yellow-white and glowing, something like a living flame.

"Oh my," said Harry.

The light-glob on our windshield twisted and flickered, forming itself into the shape of a wiry little man. His face was sharp and pointed, with a mischievous slash-mouth and great, staring eyes. A goblin.

"I've seen it before," I stuttered. "I've seen that thing before."

Spots of light flickered everywhere, as far ahead of us as I could see. It was like we'd flown into a swarm of varicolored fireflies.

"It's all full of aliens," Harry gasped. "The inertia-winder's sphere of influence is full of aliens. Maybe we should leave, Fletcher. Maybe we should turn around before they get us. Hurry up and turn the ship around!"

I hesitated, lost in thought. That goblin looked just like the creature I'd seen in Snerman's office. And....

"Oh masslings, flee not so soon," said the speaker. The little green goblin bowed and capered, mouthing words. Bits of flame scattered off his fingertips.

Another glob of light flopped into our windshield. It was mostly red and brown. As before, the flickering damped down, and the thing took humanoid shape.

"That's a gnome," said Harry, his voice cracking a little. "A little gnome just like the statue that Mother had in our backyard. These aren't aliens, Fletcher, these are...."

"How do you do, and how do you do, and how do you do again," boomed a voice as the red-jacketed little gnome bowed in turn to Harry, the goblin and me. He had muddy boots and a dense white beard. A pleasant-looking fellow.

Another shape landed, and another. A slender pink sprite with gauzy gold wings, and a blobby mermaid. They all looked ... familiar, like things seen or dreamed once before.

"Come out, come out, come out and play," sang their voices, and the eldritch creatures pressed up against our windshield. The gnome produced a sturdy silver hammer from inside his coat and began tapping at our titaniplast, as if looking for the right place. The mermaid drooled, the goblin snickered, and the little sprite made limbering-up gestures with her magic wand.

"Look out!" screamed Harry. "They're going to break our windshield!"

"Let's get out of here," I cried, reaching for the gearshift. "I'm going to cut the drive back...."

But just then the windshield shattered. The gaping hole with its shards of plastic was like a horrible insatiable mouth. the air screamed out past us, while loose cargo flew this way and that. I struggled to hang onto the steering wheel, but the wind was too strong. I let it take me then, I let myself

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flutter out like a dead leaf. No use fighting it, we were dead for sure.

The cold nothingness of space burned into my nose and lungs, like alpine air at first, coming on and on, infinitely empty, utterly pure. Something grabbed me by the leg, something hot, the goblin.

That should have been it ... but it wasn't. The sprite ran her wand all over me, coating me with an even, golden glow. Suddenly the frost on my tongue melted and I could breathe. No, that's not quite right. It wasn't that I could breathe, it was that I no longer *needed* to breathe. The aching nausea of suffocation went away as soon as the wand touched my lips. Somehow the sprite had wrapped me in an energy barrier and had put my viscera in stasis.

I could move around as easily as ever. The first thing I did was look to see what had happened to Harry. He was still in his seat, his legs grimly wedged against the dash. His eyes had a glazed, staring quality ... frozen solid? The sprite went in after him.

It occured to me that I was hearing voices, an impossibility in empty space. Could it be telepathy? Maybe it had been telepathy all along ... I didn't recall ever having turned the radio *on*, come to think of it.

"Greet thee meet in ever neverplace," said the goblin, still clutching my leg in his hot, flickering hand. "Seekers be ye free to slide?"

"He can't understand that," said the gnome, tugging on his beard. "He doesn't know what you're talking about, Fire. I wonder what his name is?" The sturdy little man floated in front of me, waiting for me to introduce myself.

I went ahead and pretended I could talk, letting the words form in my mind. "I'm Joe Fletcher. My partner's name is Harry Gerber. We built the machine that's at the center of this sphere. We want to turn it off. But who are you?"

"I'm called *Earth*," said the gnome. "But really I'm from everywhere. The goblin is *Fire*, and the ladies are *Air* and *Water*. We're elementals."

"Wawa," said the soggy mermaid called Water. "Wa glub.'

"Silly Water," sang the sprite. She'd finished coating Harry with pixie-dust. "You're all right now, Harry Gerber."

Harry stared at me, his fish-like mouth agape.

"It's O.K.," I said — or thought — to him. "I mean it's sort of O.K. Talk to me subvocally. I'll be able to hear."

"We're both dead and it's sort of O.K.?"

"I don't think we're dead, Harry."

"Dearth not dead," interjected the goblin.

"Wa glubby glub," said Water.

"We like your machine," said the gnome. "It's nice in here, in this big black sphere. Usually we can't stop moving."

"This is Earth, Air, Fire, and Wa-

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ter," I told Harry. "They're elemental spirits. Gnome, sprite, goblin, mermaid."

"What about all the others?" asked Harry, sticking his head out through our broken windshield. There were zillions of other bright beings, darting and dancing as far as the eye could see.

"Those are all us, too," said Earth the gnome. "There's only one of me, but I weave back and forth through all of space and time."

"Me first," corrected the goblin. "Only me in the wee, wee start."

"I come before the start," said Air melodiously. "I am the framework."

"Wa glub," said Water, waving a slack hand at the other three and then at herself. "Gaga me."

"She means that she is logically prior to all of us," said the sprite. "In the sense that form and becoming are more basic than substance and being."

"Wawa glubglub," agreed the mermaid. Her color fluctuated from blue to gray. Her lower half was the traditional fishtail, and her upper half was like a nude woman's. But she was lumpy, by no means the sexy doll that the word "mermaid" conjures up. Great lumps and bulges rippled her flesh like waves on a wind-whipped sea. Now and then a glob of her body would pinch off and drift away into space.

Nor was the sprite sexy in any ordinary sense. Her slender bubblegum-pink body was so attenuated as to be insect-like. With her buzzing gold wings she was more like a dragonfly than a person. Yet there was something sweet about her small face, something sweet and deeply intelligent.

The goblin's sharp face also seemed to hold some great wisdom, but a wisdom too arcane for me ever to grasp. Of all the elementals, he seemed the most familiar to me. I'd seen him, or a copy of him in D.C. the day we launched the winder. And I'd seen him before that: in my dreams, out of the corner of my eye in cities, or on lonely walks in the woods, and most of all, of course, in fires. Have you ever stared too long at a log fire, stared so long that the darting little flames become speedy men peeping out of the wood's cracks? Speedy men, each a goblin, each a loop of Fire's tangled life-line.

The gnome was the most human of the elementals. He looked just right, with dirty brown boots and pants, and with a red jacket and cap. The cap was pointed, and fell over to one side.

"I don't believe this," said Harry, struggling out of our spaceship. "This is so unscientific it makes me sick. I'd almost rather die than be saved by pixie-dust. Why don't you ... elementals tell me you're from Betelgeuse or Proxima Centauri. It'd me me feel a whole lot better."

"We're not from anywhere in particular," said the sprite, taking Harry's arm to keep him from drifting off. "We're abstract concepts personified. Like the electron. The *electron* is in each piece of matter right? Or space. *Space* is everywhere."

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"Not right now it isn't," said the gnome, with a nervous glance over his shoulder. "It hasn't been around recently. I think that's because there's no inertia in here."

"Space as squid is lurking ere wot ye...." began the goblin, but Harry interrupted.

"Well, *we* aren't from everywhere. We're from the planet Earth. And you've ruined our ship. How are we going to get home?"

"Can't you fix that windshield?" I asked the gnome. "We just want to turn off the runaway inertia-winder and go back to our people."

"Cancel dearth?" cried the goblin. "Ah, but merry it is this way, tis the finest fairy-ring that ever was."

"Prehistoric Stonehenge isn't so bad," put in the sprite. "We're having a good time there, too."

"And the time when the Sun goes nova and black hole," added the gnome. "I'm having fun *there*."

"Wait," protested Harry. "If you're really spread out all over space and time then you must sometimes meet your past selves, right?"

"That's one way of looking at it."

"Wilst probe the savor?" asked the goblin. A twisting glob of flame, green-yellow-white, smacked into my leg. Too hot. I danced aside and the glob jelled into a copy of the goblin, a past or future self.

"What about time-paradoxes?" asked Harry. "What if your past self does something that it didn't do?"

"So what?"

"Contradictions are logically impossible," I explained. "A universe containing contradictions cannot exist."

"Glub gazork," said the mermaid. And then she did something very strange. She lifted up her arms and ... didn't lift up her arms. At the same time. She winked/smiled at Harry/me. The sprite pinched my cheek with both hands. Yet at the same time she was tickling Harry.

"You see?" said the gnome. "Who are you to tell the universe what it can do."

"The existence of the universe is already a contradiction," amplified the sprite. "Something from nothing."

"Glub gazork na bog du smeepy flan."

"Slideways in the fog."

"Tally-ho!"

"Stop!" cried Harry. "I can't take any more."

The two goblins put their arms around each other's shoulders like Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

"First boy," sang the sprite.

"Nohow," snapped a goblin.

"Second boy."

"Contrariwise," cried the other.

"This is all very interesting," I interrupted. "But what's the point? I mean will you fix our windshield or not?" The effects of the pixie-dust were beginning to wear off and I was getting cold.

"*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan/ A*

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stately pleasure dome decree," quoted the gnome, *"Where Alph the sacred river ran/ Through caverns measureless to man/ Down to a sunless sea.* This is the sunless sea, Joe Fletcher. We like it here. If we let you keep your rocket you might come back. You might turn our inertia-winder off. Or your leader, the mad general Moritz, might mindlessly attack us."

"What if the sphere of influence keeps growing," I protested. "What if all the galaxy gets eaten up?"

"That won't happen," said the sprite. "The thing's already stopped growing. It's stable now. You mustn't disturb it."

Harry and I exchanged a glance. I could read his thoughts like neon signs: *Who cares about the inertia-winder anyway?* and *I like the sprite,* and *How are we going to get back?* and....

There was a sudden screaming. It seemed to come from a great distance. One of the goblins disappeared and the other began to jabber.

"Six furlongs tis and most foully beaked. The squid draws nigh to seek her prey and snaffle down these miserable victims every one!"

"The space-squid!" exclaimed the gnome.

"Oh my," said the sprite. "Already?"

"Aaauuugh!" roared the mermaid, rippling in sloppy panic.

"Don't worry, dear," said the sprite. "These men are going to kill the squid after it eats you, remember?"

"Aaaaaarrrgh! Yubba mmpf wow!"

"What *squid?*" I demanded, but the question was suddenly superfluous. Looming up ahead was a huge, twisty, purplish form: the space squid.

It looked much like an ocean-going giant squid. Its body was a pen-shaped pod with a fluke at one end. The business end of the body sported eight tentacles and two extra-long arms, arms some thirty meters long and with broad sucker-pads at the ends.

Watching us closely with its huge, intelligent eyes, the creature drew closer. Its method of propulsion was elegant: a flexible funnel sticking out of its body spewed a jet of glowing ions.

Before any of us could really react (or perhaps the elementals had no will to alter a known future,) the long arms' sucker-pads had seized the mermaid. She gave a gurgling cry and was drawn away from us towards the space-squid's bunched and writhing wreath of tentacles. I could make out a great hooked beak in the center, a beak like a parrot's, and moments later this beak sank into the mermaid's watery flesh.

Her screams were overwhelming. Listening against my will, I felt the slash of the creature's beak, I felt the grip of its tooth-ringed suckers, I felt the horror of becoming food.

"Quick," shouted Harry. "Let out the superslime!"

Yes! The superslime! I zipped into our ship and opened up the toilet vent. At first there was no reaction, but

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when I stuck in my hand the slime came surging after.

"Get under the car," Harry told the elementals. "Go around behind it and wait till the squid tries to eat the superslime."

"We knew you'd do this," said the gnome happily. "You humans are so delightfully sequential."

The slime was thickly feeling for me, its glistening surface athrob. I led it out through the broken windshield, out into space. As the slime was vacuum-adapted, this caused it no pain. It flowed out, bulking ever larger. Now the space-squid's arms came reaching towards us again.

A quick, inertialess twist and flip put me safe under the car with the others. Using my pixie-dust ESP, I could pick up the feeling of both slime and squid. *EAT! GRAB! EAT! GRAB!*

The two met like long-lost lovers: tentacles seizing the slime, slime engulfing the tentacles. The hideous beak gobbled chunks of superslime while the slime's acids dissolved great sections of the squid. In a matter of minutes nothing at all was left: they consumed each other totally.

"Like an electron meeting a positron," marvelled Harry. "Now will you three fix our spaceship?"

"Even if they fix it, we're going to have a hard time with no slime for food and air," I worried.

"We *won't* fix it," said the gnome. "We don't want anyone coming back out here. What's more, Harry Gerber is going to *forget* how to build inertia-winders."

"Zap," said the sprite, tapping Harry's head with her wand. "That does it."

I felt a sudden horror of the void of space stretching out on all sides of us.

"Help us," I begged the goblin. "Isn't there a way for us to go back?"

"Go slideways."

"We don't know how."

"We can push you," said the gnome. "Where do you want to land?"

"And when?" added the sprite.

"At Nancy's sister's house in Virginia," I said.

"June twenty-fourth," said Harry. "Like it should be. Please send us back. I really don't remember how to build the inertia-winder. I promise."

The goblin danced, the sprite waved her wand, and the gnome put his hands on our backs and shoved. We tumbled head over heels slideways fro, and crashed down onto Nancy's sister's dining table.

Nancy was, on the whole, glad to see me. I moved into her bedroom, and they let Harry sleep on the couch. Our plan was to lie low for a few weeks. Everything would have been fine if Nancy's sister hadn't asked Harry to fix her TV set. But that's another story.

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George Guthridge is a regular contributor to F&SF; Dianne Thompson is a new writer who lives in Montana and has sold to Asimov's SF Magazine. *Their collaboration is a short chiller about a New York vet who returns to a German forest to investigate the mysterious killing of his brother's sheep.*

Legacy

BY

GEORGE FLORANCE-GUTHRIDGE and DIANNE M. THOMPSON

I had no sooner climbed off the train at Zuurdorf, the engine snorting in the foggy twilight, than Heinrich, my older brother, embraced me quickly and grabbed my satchel. "We've got to get to the house," he said. He looked nervous. "I'm afraid I won't be able to offer you the vacation you wanted, Rudi — at least not yet. The dogs are watching the flock, but I think my prized ewe might be going into premature labor. I've got her penned."

We hurried through the village. Shawled women holding brooms and men hoeing gardens appeared slightly ghostlike as they stopped working to watch us. We were a contrast: Heinrich, the German shepherd in alpine hat and homespun sweater and the waistcoat whose horn buttons he'd carved himself, me the Americanized vet in the English tweed suit I'd purchased at Sable's in Manhattan.

"Has she dilated yet?"

"No. The contractions are so far apart I'm not even sure it *is* labor. But she'd started that restless wandering."

"I'll do what I can," I told him.

"That's all I can ask."

We reached the meadows and started up the steep grassy slopes, away from the river, Heinrich using his staff to aid his long strides. I could hear the occasional clinking of sheep bells high above us. The air carried the chill of another unpredictable spring, a season sometimes quiet, sometimes compelling. How often I'd felt that same chilled disquiet within myself! My return to Germany had only increased its intensity.

My lungs soon became beleaguered, and I stopped for breath. It had been seven years since I'd climbed among these pasture bottoms, meadows hemmed by the Bohemian Forest

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and nutured by the drainages of the Danube and Isar. Seven years since Heinrich had won the Iron Cross at Neuve Chapelle and we had experienced the horror of Ypres. Heinrich, thirty yards in the lead, looked oddly like a stone landmark as he stopped and waited for me. I trudged forward and found him gazing at me in exasperation. "Too much city life, Rudi?"

"Long time since I walked any mountains." Panting, I sleeved sweat from my forehead.

"Just a little ways more." Then, his voice tight with tension. "You've got to readjust to conditions here, if you're to help me."

I glanced at him quizzically, but his gaze was turned forward, and then, his hand on my back, we started off. Gradually the fog thinned, and I could see the Tirolian Alps. Heinrich pointed out his sheep milling in the meadow to the left, their black noses poking from rain-soaked mats of gray-white wool, and for a moment I didn't know why I'd ever left Germany. A New York practice specializing in old ladies' cats and canaries: what sort of life was that, compared to living among such pastoral beauty! After having lost several patients and a malpractice suit, I'd decided I needed a vacation; now I wondered if I hadn't returned to Bavaria in search of something more permanent, something I'd left behind.

We reached his chalet, set among white pine. Like most houses in the area, it was two-storied — animals on the bottom, human above. The smell of manure and creosote and wet wool renewed my longing for the years of my youth, when our father would send Heinrich and me away from the butcher shop for days at a time, to roam these hills and find work with the shepherds and farmers.

Heinrich trod down the straw-strewn path that separated the sheep pens from the chicken coops and woodpile, reached the pen nearest the stairs, and peered over the rail. His face went white. "Oh, my god," I heard him mutter, and I hurried up alongside.

Her sides heaving, the ewe was lying in the corner, a blood-swathed lamb, its eyes shut, beside her. Hanging from the ewe's dock was an oval-shaped reddish mass stippled with fleshy spongelike knobs. Prolapsed uterus: the contractions had turned the organ inside out and pushed it outside the body. "She's in shock," I said. "We've got to get her warm."

"You brought your medical supplies?"

I shook my head. He gazed at me for an instant, lips tight, then opened the pen. "We'll take her upstairs," he said. The ewe blatted and tried to squirm away when Heinrich knelt beside her, but he spoke softly into her ear and stroked her with calloused though gentle hands, and she settled. Then, as I lifted the uterus, he cradled the animal in his arms, the ewe's eyes gleaming in apprehension and pain. I

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rested the uterus against his bicep and, awkwardly holding it there, took a shirt from my satchel and wrapped the lamb. We climbed the stairs.

"We'll need a bale of fresh hay, clean towels, a blanket, hot water," I told him as we entered the kitchen. "And hurry!"

Heinrich disappeared down the stairs, and soon I had the ewe backed against a bale, her uterus resting on warm moist towels, while Heinrich stoked the woodstove and then cleaned the lamb, washed its eyes, and placed it beside the ewe. I cleaned the uterus carefully with another towel. "Place the blanket over her head. Hold her still. Very still." I began easing the organ back inside. The slightest mistake could tear the delicate tissue. I licked my lips; my throat felt parched. Sweat beaded my forehead.

"Steady now," Heinrich said. "Careful."

"I'm doing the best I can!"

"I know. I know." He stroked the ewe, trying to relax her tense muscles. "That's a lady," he told her, "easy now," his voice so quiet that I was reminded of lullabies and softer days. The ticking of the grandfather clock, Heinrich's soothing voice, the crackling of wood within the stove filled me with nostalgia. The Bavaria of my youth again beckoned.

The ewe suddenly stirred. My fingers nearly tore the tissue.

"Damn it, Rudi, I said be careful!"

"And I said hold her still!" We glared at one another, and I could see the same terror and ugly anger I'd witnessed that night in Ypres, when on ammo detail he'd helped stack the canisters of chlorine gas for my howitzer to shoot. *Killing without the taste of the enemy's blood on your hands makes a mockery of killing,* he said, then the rest of the night he hadn't spoken. I'd been shaken — not by his silence or his platitude. By the hatred in his eyes, for what he was doing.

"I'll need needle and thread," I told him. "The vulva should be laced to keep the uterus in place." Heinrich headed toward the living room, as if relieved to be away even for a moment. "Heavy thread!" I called after him. "And scissors." I patted the ewe and buried my fingers in the thick damp wool beneath her throat to check her pulse.

Then I discovered the teethmarks.

Heinrich returned, and for the second time that evening I saw his ruddy face whiten. Trembling, he handed me a threaded needle and a pair of sheep shears. "I don't have any regular scissors," he said, his voice quavery. His eyes went downcast as I examined the wounds, turning the ewe's head slowly to the left and right.

"A dozen of my best stock killed in the past six months," he said. "I haven't been able to stop whatever's attacking them." He shook his head slowly, sadly. "I ... I failed, Rudi." He hung his head, suddenly looking drained and old beyond his years. "Don't

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even know what's doing it."

"Wolf, perhaps?"

Again he shook his head. "Wolves kill to eat. Whatever beast it is, it kills ... merely to slaughter. Greta here is the only one that's been attacked and survived. That's probably what caused her early labor."

"Couldn't have been a wild boar." I parted the wool for a closer look. "The teethmarks aren't deep enough." The wounds were nearly healed, though the line of marks was still ragged with gristle. "I don't think a bear could have done this, either. It's as though instead of tearing into the flesh some animal went for the neck, and chewed. When did this happen?"

"A month ago tomorrow. I'd gone to bed early. Wasn't feeling well. I didn't check the flock. Dogs were quiet, though." His face was ashen; he looked like he was going to be ill. "You should have seen her, Rudi. I carried her into the house. Her coat was soggy with blood." He knelt beside me, and again that hatred-horror filled his eyes. Then he said, "The others bled to death. They were smaller animals, or old ones. A couple of lambs."

"Any reports of neighboring attacks?" I lay down the ewe's head; Heinrich gripped the animal carefully as I sewed the vulva shut. The ewe quivered from the pain and fought to rise, but Heinrich held her still.

"No. No reports," he said.

"Well, must be a wolf. There've been cases of wolves with only partially developed teeth." I wiped my hands on the bloody towel. Even working with the sorriest of feline victims, I hadn't encountered so much blood since I was on emergency medical duty for one day during the war. I'd forgotten the warm, sticky feel of it. I nodded toward Greta. "She'll be all right. Don't plan on breeding her any more, though. Uterus distention is usually inherited."

"Maybe it's another aftereffect of the attack. She's been so frightened. Poor baby!" He was holding the ewe's head close to his neck and rocking slowly side to side.

Cleaning the shears, I wandered into the living room. It smelled of old books and musty leather. Beside the stone fireplace was the gun cabinet that once stood in our parents' house. The cabinet doors, framed in ornately carved mahogany, contained a colored-glass scene of two hunters taking aim at pheasants in flight. Shadows from the lamp glimmering against the glass gave the illusion of movement. I smiled inwardly, not at the illusion but at the entrapment of birds forever fleeing. An old feeling of power returned. "Tell you what, Heinrich. Tomorrow night or the next we'll stake out your phantom predator and put an end to it. Just like old times, eh? You bring the beast down, I'll butcher it, and we'll cook up a meal worthy of kings. Agreed?"

He didn't answer. I turned, and he was looking angrily toward me. "You sound as though my situation is part of

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some game. This may be a vacation for you, but for me...." His face trembled with fury. "For me," lifting the ewe's head so I'd be reminded of the teeth-marks, "this is a matter of survival. You never were a shepherd, Rudi. You shepherded, you romanticized the life, but you never were a shepherd. Not here," thumping his chest with his index finger, "in your heart! Now you've returned — for what? A little sport? A quick solution to my problems, and off you go again, a knight on a white horse? Well, there are no easy answers, Rudolph Schoenfeld. No quick solutions you can give with your medical education or those guns there." He touched his hat. "I wear my brim turned down, as is the custom for bachelors. I have no wife, no family. These sheep, my sheep, they're my family. And I'm losing them. One by one, they're being killed. I must find whatever is doing it. And it will die. But not as sport, Rudi." He shook his head. "Not as sport." He patted the ewe's head and, standing, glared at me with contempt. "I tell you it was no wolf. The dogs would have put up a ruckus. It was no wolf!" He left, slamming the door.

I started after him, then stopped. Best to leave him alone until his anger passed. Besides, he was right; I wasn't a shepherd. I would never degrade myself by believing that just because the sheep were *my* labor and *my* livelihood only something extraordinary could kill them. Shepherds and their superstitions! The Bohemian Forest abounded with tales of mythical creatures bedeviling flocks and isolated villages. Usually the reality was less than legend: a black bear, a wolf, a rabid bat, poachers. Even the uncommon could be rationally explained: the 1916 Munich werewolf, killer of two children, that made headlines in the *Durrenplatz* while we soldiers dying in the trenches were considered old news. Turned out to be a Doberman run wild.

I returned to the gun cabinet and took out the Dreilling Heinrich had inherited from our father, who in turn had inherited it. A classic beauty. Its three barrels, stacked pyramid-like, were covered with platinum and gold scroll inlay. The trigger guard, of sterling silver, was engraved with oak leaves surrounding a wild boar. I ran my fingers across the deep walnut stock and brass lockplate, then hefted the gun, checked the balance, raised the piece and took aim at the face of the grandfather clock. The gun seemed to carry a magic of its own, a power over anything it was aimed at. A power, certainly, over Heinrich's sheep killer.

"You remember how to use that?" Heinrich was standing in the doorway, his features twisted and changed, like a bad portrait whose colors have begun to run. The hatred in his eyes had deepened. It chilled me. He opened the kitchen shutters and gazed with a kind of expectant terror toward the sky.

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"Or does an artillery man like you need miles and a staunch infantry between you and your enemy?"

"The war is over, Heinrich."

"For you, perhaps." He pushed past me, took a bolt-action Mauser shotgun and a box of shells from the cabinet and went out the door. I listened to his footsteps on the stairs, then grabbed some rounds, stuffed them into my pocket, and followed him, my heart pounding with sudden excitement.

Heinrich was at the edge of the dooryard, near the stone fence, his face silvery in the moonlight as he stared toward the fog-wisped vale that separated the farm from the next meadow. From beyond came barking and nervous bleating. The dogs were bringing the sheep home. I started to smile, then I realized something was wrong, and fear tingled through me. The herd was strung out. Afraid to return? Something lurking nearby?

"What is it?" I whispered.

He stared straight ahead. "He's in there." His voice was gravelly, his breathing rapid. He nodded toward the stand of pine along the vale's crease. Then, shifting the weight of the Mauser, he scissor-stepped across the fence and moved hunched toward the right across the newly plowed field. For a split second I saw him and other soldiers emerging from trenches, crossing a shell-pocketed no-man's-land as flares burst and machine guns rattled. He motioned: go left.

My pulse thudded within my temples as I entered the stand. The pines were tall and skinny, and a claustrophobic tension seized me as I moved between the trees. Twigs snapped beneath my feet. Moss brushed my cheek. The barking grew louder, more persistent. To my right I heard something moving through the stand, something whose breathing was low and gutteral. Just Heinrich, I told myself, yet my fingers twitched and moved closer to the trigger. I slid down into the muddy creekbed, the heart of the crease, then crawled up the other side and, parting foliage, peered toward the herd.

The sheep had stopped, the leaders starting to circle. The two dogs, a terrier and a collie cross, seemed almost fluid among the shadows, both animals moving around the flock, pulling them in tight, sensing danger. Suddenly the collie halted and, hackles raised, teeth bared, snarled toward where I was crouching. *Friend, you idiot!* I wanted to yell....

A scream of pain shattered the air. Then Heinrich's voice, "Rudi, help me!" and from the shadows and low branches beyond the herd came a growling like an enraged bear. "Oh, god!" I heard him shriek.

"I'm coming, Heinrich!" I scrambled up and started across the meadow.

Snarling, the collie leaped, its eyes protruding with rage. I raised my arms to shield myself. In that instant, that tableau as the dog was in air, a tran-

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scendence enveloped me. Perhaps Heinrich had experienced a similar transcendence when armed only with a bayonet he'd singlehandedly slaughtered half an enemy platoon at Neuve Chapelle. Though he swore he remembered little of the event, perhaps he, too, saw the faces of our Bavarian ancestors shimmering within moonlight, acknowledging the bravery that centuries before had made them famous as defenders of thier feudal masters.

With a deft ease that was almost frightening, I sidestepped and with a butt stroke of the Dreilling knocked the collie to the ground. I stumbled onward, my breath suddenly raging in my ears. My senses seemed strangely acute — my footsteps thundering on the spongy grass, shadows making my flesh tingle. I smelled fear among the sheep, and exulted in the scent. *Come to me, killer of sheep. Come to me!*

A grunting, bulky shadow ran on all fours from where Heinrich had screamed. Sheep scattered, high shaky bleats and the terrier's frantic yipping filling the night. Lambs pushed against the bellies of their mothers as the skitterish herd moved in a circle. The shadow beast disappeared among the flock, but I could now smell the creature, smell the raging of its blood. Heinrich's torn and tangled waistcoat was lying on the ground and his sweater dangled from a low branch, but there was no sign of my brother, and I almost felt like laughing as garbled growls and a hollow gurgling erupted behind me. I spun and glimpsed something struggling with a kicking lamb, blood spurting from the sheep's throat as the elongated shadow bit and tore ... and then the Dreilling was at my shoulder, my flesh against the cheekpiece, and I cackled with delight....

The gun kicked, the retort echoing across the valley. I blinked, discovered myself on my knees. "Oh, my god." Stomach clenched, I staggered to my feet and stumbled forward, fearing what I'd find.

Heinrich was sprawled beside the quivering lamb. He was naked to the waist, a wound near his heart pulsing black that steamed in the night air. His mouth was blood-splashed. Except it was not my brother's mouth. It was a canine's maw. The lips hideously twisted and loose, a piece of torn lambflesh hanging from one corner. Gore was smeared on his neck and arms, and he was clutching tufts of gray-white hair; his hands matted with dark fur. I removed my coat and knelt to cover him. He lifted his left hand and his claws caught the light. "Ruu ... dii."

"Thank God. You're alive." I stuffed my handerchief against the wound. His flesh felt hot and jellylike and slick with blood.

He held his hand close to his eyes, then his head lifted and his face filled with piteous horror. "No," he moaned. "Please ... no." He shuddered and lay back, staring into the fog. "So it ... it

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was me. All along. Afraid ... it ... it might be." His words came out in huffs, so gravelly they were nearly incomprehensible. "Didn't want to ... admit it ... to myself. The black ... outs. Like during the ... the war." My pulse was hammering and I was afraid, but I lifted him and draped his arm across my shoulders. We staggered across the meadow. I passed the collie lying on her side, blood trickling from her nose.

"Sa ... save the ... lamb, Rudi."

"Hush now." We entered the woods. "Not much further." I saw the lights from the house between the trees. The lights seemed far away, cold and hostile.

Heinrich's head lolled and, losing consciousness, he slumped to the ground. Unable to heft his bulk over my shoulders, I cursed softly and started dragging him. Twice I had to stop, nauseated. But at last, the house. No way to get him upstairs. I lay him in a stall, then dashed up to the kitchen, rummaged through cabinets, finally found a hunting knife and heated it in the stove. Only way to stop the bleeding would be to sear the wound.

I returned and peeled back the handerchief. His chest was peppered with birdshot. His mouth and hands again looked human. For a moment I knelt poised over him, the knife white-blue with heat. His eyes blinked open; he clutched my wrist.

"Let me ... die, Rudi. Please." His voice sounded less gutteral. "The blood ... our ancestral blood. Your blood, my brother. Bavarian, not American. You...." He coughed; bloody phlegm drooled from his mouth. "You left the old ways, but...." More coughing. "...but they did not leave you." His breathing shallowed and his eyes welled with tears. "You are ... as I am. Have you felt the restlessness? The desire ... to kill? The blackouts will come, Rudi. I think that's why...." He brought my hand to his cheek. "...why father sometimes sent us ... away from the shop, into the ... hills." His eyes closed, though he continued clinging to my wrist. "And I ... your age ... at Chapelle...." His hand relaxed, fell to the straw.

My head was ringing as I stared at the blood on his chest. Warm, thick human blood. It smelled different than the ewe's had. I shook my head. *Can't think such thoughts. Must save Heinrich.*

I sponged the wound with a towel. Ridiculous. I was a vet, not a doctor. And this was certainly no hospital. Kitchen towels and a hunting knife. I shivered, and sweat rolled down between my shoulder blades. *Got to stop the bleeding.* I pressed the knife against the wound. His body contracted, he moaned, and the acrid stench of burnt skin invaded my nostrils. Blood continued to seep from the jellied mass of flesh. I swore and, grabbing the towel, pressed down on his chest. His heart throbbed beneath my touch.

A feeling of power gradually flood-

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ed me. Once again, as with the Dreilling, I was the controller of life and death. I wiped sweat from my face, accidentally smeared my lips with blood. A delightful chill spasmed along my spine.

"Board!" the conductor bellowed. The train whistled. Steam rose. The engine chugged, cars jerked, and we started forward. Standing on the rear platform, I listened to the rails click faster and faster and watched the Zuurdorf station sign and then the station itself diminish in the distance. At last I entered the car. Perhaps a good cigar would settle my unease.

The car was opulent: rich red draperies, soft leather, brass ornaments, the scent of cognac and Havana cigars and *eau de cologne*. None of the other passengers, men hidden behind papers or intent upon games of chess and chance, heeded me. Of that I was glad. I had had too much of people lately.

How long had it been? Two days? Three? A week? I remembered the horse-drawn ambulance pulling away, the driver ringing the wagon bell. I remembered police, vague faceless uniforms. Voices telling me to leave Germany or risk possible arrest. Then my own voice, muffled and unreal: I tried to save him! He was my brother. I loved him!

The train whistled again, a long shrill that said goodbye. Picking up a newspaper, I sighed and settled back. The ease did not come. I was leaving Bavaria forever; going back to Manhattan, against my will. But not, I resolved as I glared toward the other passengers, back to cats and canaries. With the money the sale of the farm was sure to bring, I would be able to finish my medical education. Become a surgeon. It would mean a new life. New patients.

But the old ways, Heinrich.

I would not forget the old ways.

Coming soon

Next month: "Gilpin's Space," a new novella by **R. Bretnor,** about what might happen if a scientific quantum jump gave the world an instant, almost do-it-yourself star drive. Also, fantastic new tales from Avram Davidson, Michael Shea and others.

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Phyllis Eisenstein's recent stories here include "In the Western Tradition," (March 1981) and "Nightlife," (February 1982). Her new story concerns a young boy whose fascination with the subway leads to a remarkable discovery...

Subworld

BY
PHYLLIS EISENSTEIN

You've seen the blind man. You've passed him a hundred times in the tunnel between subway lines. He sits on a campstool and sells peanuts and gum out of a burlap sack. He keeps a cigar box on his lap for money. I've always thought that he sells more peanuts than gum,' but maybe that's because I never liked gum. Donny didn't either.

Donny was five when I started taking him on the subway. Sheila had custody during the week, but on Saturdays he was mine, and we would go to museums or the zoo or downtown movies. And the blind man was always in his spot, just as he was on the days I went to work. Donny was curious from the start, turning to stare as we passed. I suppose I should have given him a swat on the behind and a quick lecture on rudeness, but that would have been embarrassing there in the crowd. That was his mother's job anyway — discipline. I was the parent who didn't have to say No.

For a few weeks Donny only stared, never saying anything. At last, though, we happened to pass the blind man as someone was buying a bag of peanuts. Donny watched her drop a quarter in the box, take a small white bag, and tear it open. The following week, he tugged at my hand as we approached. "Peanuts, Daddy?" he said. So the ritual began, and from then on the blind man received a quarter from me every Saturday.

Almost a year went by before Donny spoke to him. I would never have thought of doing it, but — like most adults — I had had a lot of practice in stifling my curiosity. Donny stood there, clutching his bag of peanuts, looking at the blind man with those wide blue eyes, those guileless eyes,

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and he said, "Why do you wear sunglasses indoors?"

I felt my face flushing. I didn't know what to say; I was too embarrassed even to mumble an apology. I wanted to drag Donny away and pretend he hadn't said anything, but he had let go of my hand and stepped toward the blind man, and I would have to move to grab him. And just for the moment, I was too flustered to move.

The man said, "I'm blind, little boy. Don't you see my white cane?"

"I see it," said Donny. "Are you crippled, too?"

He shook his head. "The cane is like a long arm. I wave it in front of me to keep from walking into things, because I can't see them like you can."

"If you can't see things, how come you know I'm a little boy?"

"That's easy," said the blind man. "I'm not deaf."

I found my voice. "Come on, Donny — we'll be late for the movie." I stretched my hand toward him, and he took it. And then we were walking, a little faster than usual, and Donny was calling over his shoulder, "See you later."

We did see him, of course, on the homeward leg of the trip. He and Donny exchanged greetings as if they had known each other forever, and so their friendship was sealed. Peanuts and conversation, every Saturday. And if the blind man wasn't there, Donny wanted to know why, as if I had to answer for him. Where was he; was he sick, was he angry with us, had he moved to another country? "I'm sure he'll be here next week," I always said, and I was usually right.

Donny loved the subway. The older he got, the more he loved it. When he was seven, he started wanting to ride the trains from one end of the line to the other. The zoo, I would say; the new movie, the museum with all the push buttons, but no — he wanted to ride the subway. He would sit by the front window, his nose pressed to the glass, watching the lights and tracks rush toward us.

He also loved the platforms. He would wander around them, reading the advertisements, the system maps, the graffiti on the walls. He especially liked to look down on the tracks, at the places between the rails where mesh garbage traps were set — low, squarish things, open at one end so that the rushing wind of an approaching train would sweep trash into them. At first he wanted to know why they weren't squashed by the trains ... and then he had to lean over in front of a waiting train to prove to himself that the cars really did sit high enough on the tracks to pass over them. That was the first time I ever yelled at him, when I yanked him away from the edge. He looked up at me in total innocence and said, "But the train wasn't *moving*."

"Do you see that sign?" I said, pointing to the wall across the tracks. Of course he had seen it: PLEASE STAND BEHIND THE YELLOW LINE.

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The yellow line marked the edge of the platform.

"I was careful," he said.

"I don't care how careful you were. What if the motorman had started the train while you were leaning out in front of it?"

He looked down at his feet. "I'm sorry."

We watched the train roar off down the tunnel, leaving a string of red lights in its wake. The lights turned yellow, then green.

"Look, Daddy," Donny said, tugging at my sleeve. "The paper. It's *moving*."

In the garbage trap, crumpled napkins and paper cups and newspapers were rustling. When a tiny gray body shot out of the trap, Donny squealed and jumped, clutching me with both hands. "What is it?"

"A mouse. See, there's another."

"A mouse!" He took a step toward the edge of the platform, but I held him back by one elbow.

"You'll watch them from back here," I said.

"But it's a mouse!"

"From back here."

He was fascinated by their scrambling about the garbage trap, by their dodging under the rails and across the ties. "What are they doing, Daddy?"

"Looking for food, I suppose. Maybe some candy left in those wrappers."

He took the white bag from his pocket. There were a few peanuts left in it. He threw one down on the tracks. It lay there, pale against the grime of the tunnel floor. When no mouse approached it, he turned a disappointed face to me. "Don't they want it, Daddy?"

"They're not like squirrels in the park, Donny. They're afraid of people. I'm sure they'll come and get it sometime, though. They probably don't get peanuts very often."

"What *do* they eat then?"

"Things people don't want. Things people drop accidentally. Look at all that garbage in the trap. People throw a lot of things onto the tracks, even though they're not supposed to."

"I wouldn't want to eat garbage," he said, and he took out another peanut and tossed it onto the tracks. A few minutes later, a mouse did come out of some hiding place too close to the platform for us to see and cautiously approached one of the peanuts. But then the tunnel began to vibrate from an oncoming train, and the mouse skittered away.

"They'll be hurt!" Donny cried. "They'll be run over! Daddy! Oh, Daddy! The poor mice!"

"I don't think they'll be hurt," I said, my hand tightening on his shoulder just to be sure that he stayed behind the yellow line. "They're so small that the train will go right over them without ever touching them."

He was very relieved to see them reappear when the train was gone. And this time, one picked a peanut up in its mouth and scooted away with it.

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"Maybe it's a mother mouse," Donny said, "taking it home to her babies."

"Maybe," I said. "And how about us going home, too? Aren't *you* hungry?"

He nodded reluctantly. "But can't we stay just a *little* while longer? Look, there's another one!"

"A little while," I said. To be perfectly honest, I rather enjoyed watching the creatures, too. There had been mice in the subway for a long time. I had seen them when I was a kid. They were cute; not like cartoon mice, but still, in their own way, cute. Next, I guessed, Donny would ask for a mouse of his very own. I was already trying to formulate a good answer for that one, although I expected the cold truth would be best: his mother would never allow it. That would pass the buck, and the questions, to her. *The tough ones are yours, Sheila,* I thought; *you didn't even want me to have him on weekends.*

But he never asked me. Maybe he knew better, even at seven. He remained fascinated by the mice, though. He talked to them, as he talked to the animals in the zoo, to the squirrels in the park. He really needed a pet, I thought, and I tried to make it up to him by thinking up new and marvelous places to take him. Children's plays, puppet shows, circuses, amusement parks. But still, though he took pleasure in it all, he found a special delight in standing on the subway platform watching the mice.

"I wish I could go down there and play with them," he said.

"They'd be afraid of you."

"Not *me.* I'd be their friend."

"They might bite you."

"I'd be gentle, Daddy."

I held his hand tightly. "The tracks are electrified. If you touched them, you'd be burned badly. Remember when you burned yourself on the frying pan? Remember how it hurt?"

He looked up at me doubtfully. "The mice run across the tracks."

"They run across the ties. The ties are made of wood, and they're safe. The rails are made of metal and they're electrified. The mice are small enough to crawl underneath the rails without touching them. But you're not."

"I'd be careful."

"And while you were trying to play, a train could run you over."

He pointed to one of the wall niches where workmen could retreat to let the trains pass by. "I'd stand there every time one came through."

"It's too dangerous," I said firmly.

He looked up at me. "I was just wishing, Daddy," he said in a very small voice. "Don't be angry."

And then I had to hug him to show that I wasn't.

I never told his mother about those "wishes." I knew that she'd throw a fit about my not looking after her son properly. Her way would be to smack him a couple of times when he talked about playing with the mice, to knock the idea out of his head. She was al-

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ways the one to say a flat No, without reason, without discussion. To him. To me. Her answers were always sharp, clean-cutting; and if you didn't jump *her* way ... well, the best thing to do was leave. Or you'd be thrown out. I couldn't say any more which it had been with me. I only knew that I hadn't been the husband she'd wanted, or needed. Nor the proper sort of father to her son. She probably spent the week telling Donny that everything I said on Saturday was wrong. Poor kid, I thought. And poor me. Someday she was going to force him into making a choice between her and me, and I figured I'd be the one to lose. So I didn't say No to him, and I didn't yell at him, and I didn't punish him, because I wanted the time that we had to be cheerful, to be full of good memories for both of us. I spoiled him. She hated me for it.

We started buying two bags of peanuts after that day, one for Donny and one for the mice. Donny explained the situation very carefully to the blind man, who smiled and took two quarters from us. He didn't say — and I didn't say — that the subway authorities probably left poison for the mice and wouldn't appreciate anyone feeding them.

Sometimes I felt a little nervous about Donny throwing peanuts onto the tracks. I kept looking over my shoulder, knowing there was an embarrassed grin on my face, looking for some cop who would sneak up on us with a lecture on littering. There were signs everywhere, of course, on using the trash bins. People mostly ignored them, tossing lit cigarettes down on the ties, or crumpled bags with the remnants of lunch, or unwanted newspapers. But Donny had read the signs — why should I have doubted it? — and understood that when the police came by, the peanuts stayed in his pocket. Seven years old and he already knew that getting caught was bad, not the act itself.

By the time Donny was eight, he was telling the blind man all about his week, about school and his friends and his mother. The blind man never said much in return, just smiled and made encouraging noises as Donny babbled. I finally stopped being embarrassed by these chats, stopped rocking from foot to foot as people hurried by me to catch their trains. I came to feel that I knew him, too, as I knew my regular checker at the supermarket or my regular bank teller. And yet I knew nothing about him except that he was blind and he sold peanuts for a quarter in the subway.

Their favorite topic was the mice. Donny would talk enthusiastically about them, describing their latest activities, their scrambling through the trash trap or dashing off with peanuts, and the blind man would nod. The ninth or tenth time that Donny said, in that wistful little voice, "I wish I could

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play with them," the blind man cocked his head to one side, almost as if he could see Donny. "Do you really wish it?" he said.

"Yes. Oh, yes."

"Well, then, maybe I can do something about that."

I shook my head automatically, then remembered whom I was talking to and said, "Please don't make any promises to the boy; I don't think his mother would approve."

He tilted his head up to me, and the overhead lights glinted off his dark glasses. "We don't have to tell his mother," he said. He turned to Donny. "Can you keep a secret, son?"

"Oh, yes," said Donny.

"And can your Daddy keep a secret?"

Donny looked up at me. "Can you?"

"That depends," I said. "I won't keep a dangerous secret." I didn't like the idea of Donny near the mice. Mice were dirty, diseased, maybe even rabid. These weren't laboratory mice, after all. "Mice have very sharp teeth."

"There's no danger," said the blind man.

I put my hand on Donny's shoulder. "I thought we were going to the ball game."

"It doesn't matter, Daddy," he said.

"I thought you were excited about this game."

"But it's a *secret*, Daddy. We can always go to another ball game."

I looked at the blind man. "What are you talking about, mister?"

He shook his head. "I can't tell you anything in a public place. But I'll show you."

"What do you want to show us, and where do you want to show it?"

"You'll see when we get there. It isn't far away. Will you come?"

"Oh, Daddy, *please*."

"This is silly," I said. "We're not going anywhere but the ball game."

"I think you'll find it interesting, too," said the blind man. "Most folks do."

"Daddy, *please*."

"How far?"

"A few minutes' walk."

I looked down at Donny's eager face. I couldn't imagine what the blind man wanted to show us. Or rather, I *could* imagine all sorts of things, things I would prefer Donny didn't see. "What is it?" I said. "Some sort of private menagerie?" I thought of cages full of mice, shredded newspapers heaped about, droppings, insects infesting the whole thing.

"I promise you it's interesting," said the blind man. "And pleasant."

I frowned, trying to look stern for Donny's benefit. "How much will it cost us?"

"It's free."

"Oh, Daddy, *please*."

I looked at my son once more. Well, I didn't need to see a ball game. "All right," I said. "If it isn't far."

The blind man dropped his camp stool and cigar box into his burlap sack

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and slung it over a shoulder. He gestured with his cane. "This way." He started down the tunnel at a brisk pace, swinging his cane in a shallow arc before him. We followed. The crowd was thin for the moment, a burst of travelers having just passed, and so the rest were able to give us a wide berth. About a dozen yards down the tunnel, he turned right through a narrow archway and descended a flight of steps.

The stairway was steep, and I held Donny's hand to keep him from falling. The light was bad, too, naked bulbs behind heavy mesh, and I was none too sure of my own footing in the shadows. The stairway led to another tunnel about twenty yards long, and then another, shorter stairway at the end of that.

The blind man paused at the top step. "Stay close to me," he said. "It's easy to get lost."

We descended into an area of muted light. It might have been a room, but I couldn't see any walls or ceiling. Instead there was a great, jagged, convoluted mass of material before me, some of it white, some gray, with here and there splotches of red or yellow or blue. It appeared to be a rigid substance, like sheets of styrofoam folded, broken, crumpled into a vast and unfathomable sculpture. Like cardboard mashed and twisted into a jungle. And it was all translucent, scattering and mellowing light that came from unseen sources.

An open space lay before us, floored and roofed and walled by the stuff. The blind man stepped into it, his feet sinking up to the ankles with a rustling sound, He motioned to us to follow. My feet sank, too, and it was like walking on mounded pillows, treacherous, playing havoc with my sense of balance. The stuff shifted, and I felt myself floundering; when I reached out to a wall for support, it also yielded under my hands. I fell over.

When I climbed to my feet, the blind man had vanished.

"I think we should go to the ball game," I said to Donny. "This doesn't look interesting at all."

Donny pushed at one of the walls, and it moved under his fingers with a crinkling sound. "I think it's kind of nice," he said. "Like a cave." He had seen pictures of caves. He tugged at my arm. "Come on, Daddy; let's see the rest."

I glanced over my shoulder. We were only a few paces from the stairway. I wondered what was supporting all this stuff, whether it would fall in on us any minute. On the other hand, the blind man had gone ahead; he wasn't afraid. And he had obviously been here before.

I let Donny pull me forward.

We moved through a tunnel of irregular size, really a string of open spaces, rising, dipping, twisting, turning — a tortuous path through a crazy forest. I felt like we had stumbled into an abandoned funhouse. I had to

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watch every step, and still I slipped and staggered over the haphazard floor. But Donny seemed to adapt to it easily, maybe because his slight weight kept him from sinking as deep in the stuff as I did.

We came to a fork in the tunnel.

"Which way shall we go, Daddy?" asked Donny.

"I don't know. I don't see any signposts." Then I shouted, "Hello!"

"Hello yourself!" came the blind man's voice. "Take the right fork. We're waiting for you."

Donny pulled at my hand, but I wouldn't move.

We?

Uneasiness struck me. I didn't know who *we* might be, and I wasn't sure I wanted to find out. The whole place suddenly gave me a chill. If nothing else, it was a firetrap, and if it burned we'd have a hell of a time finding the stairway again. And who could be waiting for us? Muggers? After all, we didn't really *know* the blind man, not even his name. I looked affluent enough. Why shouldn't he and his friends want to knock me over the head, take my wallet, and leave me here, where nobody would find me, except maybe the mice. And Donny; what would they do with Donny?

"Come on!" called the blind man.

Donny let go of my hand and scrambled away.

"Hey!" I yelled and dived after him. But he was faster in that crazy tunnel. He turned a corner and was gone, all except the rustling sound of his feet against the yielding floor. "Donny!" I shouted. And then I rounded the same corner and found him.

He stood in a large open space with the blind man and a woman. She was rather pretty; a little older than Sheila, I guessed, and a little plumper. She wore jeans and a sweatshirt. As I watched, she held out her hand to Donny, smiling, and he shook it. She glanced up at me then. "Welcome," she said. "We've heard so much about the two of you."

"Hello," I said. "We haven't heard anything about you."

"No, of course not. Wilbur is very good about that."

"Wilbur?"

She nodded at the blind man. "He's been our friend for quite a long time."

"Who are you?" I asked. "And what *is* this place?"

"Would you care for some lunch?"

Donny looked back at me. "I'm hungry, Daddy." At the ball game he would have had a hot dog and ice cream by now.

"All right," I said.

She clapped her hands three times, and in less than a minute, three people entered the open space from a tunnel opposite the one we had come by, each carrying a covered tray. They set the trays down on the floor, pressing them firmly into the surface so that they were level and stable. Then they withdrew.

"There's an art to eating here," said

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the woman, settling herself cross-legged on the floor. "Don't lean on the trays or put your weight too close to them, or they'll tip over." To demonstrate, she leaned back, stretching one arm out to lift the cover from the nearest tray. On the platter was a mound of raw vegetables. She selected a carrot. The other trays held bread, lettuce, and sliced chicken. Carefully, we made sandwiches.

"Wilbur has been observing you for a long time," the woman said. "He had to know if you were the right sort of people."

"What sort is the right sort?" I asked.

She looked at Donny. "You are."

He grinned.

"Thanks for the compliment," I said. "At least I hope it's a compliment. But the right sort for *what?*"

"We have a very pleasant life down here," she said. "Good food, good company. You'd like it."

I had to smile. "What kind of salary are you paying?"

She shook her head. "I'm not kidding."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"This isn't a job," she said. "It's a life. I'm suggesting that you join us. There's plenty of room for both of you."

"Where?"

"Here. Right here."

I looked around, at the wild sculptures we were in the middle of. "You *live* here?"

"Yes."

"Inside *this?*"

"It's very large. There's plenty of privacy, if you want it."

"Inside this stuff? I can't believe it. It's ridiculous. We're in the subway, aren't we? In some storage area?"

"Something like that."

"Are you sure this kind of thing is legal?"

"The police don't bother us."

"Do they know you're here?"

"Yes. Of course."

At that moment, four young faces peeped into the room from the other tunnel. Leaning against the wall, they made it rustle. The woman heard the noise and gestured them in. "Come," she said. "No need to be shy."

They surged forward, three boys and a girl, pushing each other in their eagerness, and they clustered about her like young puppies. They chattered all at once, so fast that I could hardly make out a word.

"Yes," she said to them, laughing. "If he wants to." She looked at Donny. "Are you interested in playing with my children?"

Donny crammed the remnants of his sandwich into his mouth and nodded vigorously. Then he glanced at me, the question in his eyes. I didn't know what to say.

"It'll give you and me a chance to talk," said the woman.

I didn't want to let him go, but he was so eager, and the other children smiled so much ... they were clean

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kids, neatly dressed, no more rambunctious than a new playmate usually made kids.

"Please, Daddy," said Donny.

So I nodded, and the fivesome scrambled off together. I heard them laughing for quite a time after I couldn't see them any more.

I turned to the woman. "What do you want to talk about?"

"You're welcome here," she said.

"What is this place? A commune?"

She nodded.

"I don't know anything about you," I said. "I don't even know your name."

"Clarissa."

I pointed to the blind man. "Does he live here?"

"No," she said. "Wilbur is happy on the outside."

"The outside," I repeated.

"He's our contact. We don't go out there, but he does."

"You don't go out?"

"Never."

"You don't ever go out of this place?"

"We don't go out of the subway."

"I find this hard to believe. Where do you get your food and clothing? Where do you get your money?"

"We don't have any money. And the food is brought in to us."

I looked at her skeptically. "What is this — some religious cult?"

"No."

"Then ... why don't you go out? Are you afraid of the sun or something?"

She smiled. "No, we're not afraid of the sun. But everything we need is here. We don't have to go out any more. And we don't want to. Do you?"

"Of course I do! My job is out there. My life is out there."

"Is it a good job?"

"Yes, a very good job."

"Do you like it?"

"Well enough."

"And do you like your life well enough?"

"I don't want to give it up for ... for this."

She leaned back, sinking into the floor as into a soft couch. "I thought that way at first. But after I'd visited down here a few times, I realized that I'd be happy giving up the job and the people and the harassment that's up there. The responsibility. The demands. I had a husband ... But I was glad to leave him. It's quieter down here. I like that." She looked sidelong at me. "You might keep that in mind. You don't have to decide now."

"I'm not going to," I said. "I'm not about to abandon everything and move in with you. However many of you there are."

"Quite a few," she said. "There's room for more."

"It's a nice life, is it?"

"Very."

"But you didn't convince Wilbur of that."

Wilbur smiled. "I didn't have anything to run away from."

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"Well, I don't either," I said.

The woman smiled. "It's nice to know there's a place to go, just in case."

I shook my head. "I'm sorry. I don't consider living in the subway a viable alternative. It's crazy. It's *got* to be illegal."

"Not for mice," she said.

I stared at her. "What do mice have to do with it?"

"We're mice," she said.

Hesitantly, I chuckled. "You think of yourself as mice?"

She nodded. "This is a mouse warren. It's made of crumpled paper bags, and old newspapers, and all the rest of the garbage that people toss onto the tracks."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm a mouse," she said. "Well, I'm really a human being, but as far as the people who ride the subway are concerned, I'm a mouse. You've seen us among the tracks."

I shook my head slowly. "You're a real kidder, aren't you?"

"No."

"Funny — you don't *look* like a mouse."

"Yes I do," she said. "When I want to."

That feeling of unease came back. Muggers would have been easier to cope with than this. I glanced at the blind man, wondering if he was as crazy as the woman. At that moment, I wanted very much to find Donny and get out of there. But I had let them take Donny away from me.

"Don't be frightened," said the woman, as if reading my mind, though my mental state probably showed on my face. "We won't hurt you. We're not crazy. In fact, we may be the sanest people in the world. We don't have any ulcers." She stretched languorously, then drew her arms and legs in to her chest. "All you need is the proper sort of illusion," she said, "and all the senses can be fooled — sight , smell, touch, everything. Stale candy bars can be transformed into a banquet. Mice into people. And people into mice." As I watched, her form ... wavered. Her arms and legs thinned, her torso fattened, her head flattened, her face protruded into a snout. Her clothes melted into gray fur, and a long, thin tail took shape at the base of her spine. She was a mouse — a human-sized, furry, bright-eyed mouse.

She rolled over to her stomach and stepped slowly toward me. I eased myself backward. Her mouth opened, showing sharp incisors, and the human voice issued from her throat: "I won't hurt you; don't be afraid." She closed her mouth, hiding those teeth, and came very close to me. I sat there tensely, ready to scramble away, but caught, fascinated by the transformation I had just witnessed. She came so near that her twitching whiskers brushed me, and they were like springy, coarse wires. She put her snout against my face, her cool moist snout, and

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licked my cheek. She put her paws up on my shoulders. She hugged me. Her fur was sleek and glossy. "You see," she whispered, "there's nothing to be afraid of." She hugged me again and then settled down close beside me, her head resting in my lap. Like a dog. Like a great collie dog. "It's very nice," she said, "being a mouse."

Somehow I found my voice. "But you're not really a mouse. I mean, you're too big to be a mouse."

"No," she said. "I'm mouse-sized. And so are you, right now. You're four inches tall."

"That's ridiculous!" I gasped.

"Nothing is ridiculous down here."

"You've hypnotized me!"

"Not really."

"Yes, you have, and I don't like it. I'm going to leave now. Where's my son?"

"Safe," she said. "Playing with the other mice."

"I want him here, now."

"He won't want to leave. Children love it down here."

"I don't care what he wants. He's going home with me if I have to tear this place apart to find him." I pushed her head off my lap and stood up, staggering to find my balance.

"Children love it down here," repeated the mouse who had been a woman. "They adapt quickly."

"I want my son!"

She looked up at me, and then she rose to her hind legs and the transformation reversed itself, the mouse melting back into a woman, the fur fading into jeans and sweatshirt. She crossed her arms over her chest. "Very well," she said. She clapped her hands four times, and a couple of moments later five laughing children burst into view, one of them mine.

Donny scrambled up to me, breathless. "Come see the pirate treasure!" he said.

I took his hand. "We're going home now, Donny."

His face fell, laughter stifled. "Do we *have* to?"

"Yes. It's getting late."

His face screwed up, and for a moment he looked like he was going to cry. But he conquered it, saying, in a stiff little voice, "Can we come back soon?"

"We'll see," I said.

He looked back at the four children. He raised one hand to wave. "See you later."

I pulled him toward the tunnel that we had come in by. Sliding and stumbling, we made our way toward the outside world. Only when I reached the first stairway did I realize that the blind man was following.

"You need me," he called.

I looked back sharply. "For what?"

"You can't get out without me. I have the key."

"I didn't notice any doors," I said.

He grinned. "Well, go on then — go on without me."

And we did, until we came to the top of the second stairway and found

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ourselves facing a blank wall. I rapped on the concrete, and it sounded solid. I turned around. The blind man stood on the bottom step. "All right," I said. "How do we get out?"

He seemed to be looking straight at me as he climbed. "They don't want to keep you prisoner, you know. Everybody who joins them does it out of choice."

"Then where's the exit?"

He put his hand against the wall. "You really were the size of a mouse down there, you know. A grown man couldn't fit in that space."

"Sure I was."

"Some of them really are mice. After a while, you get to know the difference."

Donny tugged at my hand. "Three of the children were mice, Daddy. They showed me. They said I could be one, too, if I wanted."

I looked down at him. "People are not mice," I told him.

"Sure they are, Daddy. Just like in Cinderella."

"That was a fairy tale, Donny."

"But I saw it."

I looked at Wilbur. "Get us out of here."

He tapped the wall, and an arched section faded into mist. Beyond the mist I could see people walking in the tunnel. As the traffic thinned momentarily, the mist cleared.

"Go on," said the blind man.

Donny and I stepped through. I turned back to thank our guide for the adventure, but he was gone, and in the wall of the tunnel was only a shadowed alcove, and no door at all. I fought the chill that ran up my back and started walking, pulling Donny along.

At the end of the tunnel, I glanced at the overhead clock, then at my watch. Both seemed to have stopped. Both said we had plenty of time to make the ball game. I stopped at a news stand to ask the time, and the vendor gave the same answer.

"I'm hungry, Daddy," said Donny.

"But you just had a big lunch."

"I know, but I'm still hungry."

And so was I. Fairy food, I thought. It doesn't stay with you.

So we went to the ball game and had hot dogs and ice cream, and we didn't discuss the warren down in the subway.

I didn't know what to think. I didn't want to think about it. The best approach seemed to be to ignore the whole incident, treat it like a strange dream. But Donny wasn't about to let me do that. The following Saturday, when his mother dropped him off at my place, the first thing he wanted to do was visit the mice. "The ones in the funny place all made of paper."

"Did you tell your mother about them?" I asked.

He made a sour face, like he had just bitten into a lemon. "*She'd* never understand. Besides, it's a secret, remember? Did *you* tell anybody?"

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"No, not a soul. Of course it's a secret." I frowned. "I don't think we should visit them today. We really won't have time. We're going to the zoo — they have two new lion cubs."

"Just for a little while, Daddy? It was so much fun."

"Not today, Donny. Maybe next week."

He looked up into my face. "Next week? Promise?"

"There are so many other things to do, Donny."

"Promise me, Daddy. You never break your promises."

"That's why I *won't* promise, Donny. I don't know when we can see the ... the mice again. If ever."

"Why not?"

I searched for some plausible excuse, but I couldn't find one and finally just blurted out the truth. "Because people who turn into mice scare me."

He took my hand and held it tight. "You shouldn't be scared of them, Daddy. They won't hurt you."

I squatted down beside him. "You're sure of that, are you?"

"They're nice. They wouldn't hurt *anybody*. *Please* can't we visit them again? It's a wonderful place, and the mouse children say there's so much to explore and so many things to find. We found pirate treasure last time — jewels and gold and silver. It was so much fun!"

I shook my head. "I don't know Donny. We'll talk about it another time, okay? I've got so many other plans for us...."

He hung his head. "Okay, Daddy. If you say so."

We went to the zoo. He seemed to enjoy himself.

The next day I found out about the secret that Sheila had asked him to keep from me. She called. She was moving out to the West Coast, taking Donny with her. She had a fiancé waiting there, a new father for her son; he would have a complete family again. The court had approved. I could have him for a couple of weeks during the summer if I paid his air fare.

The following Saturday Donny was very subdued. He knew that I knew.

"Everything will be all right," I said as we walked hand in hand toward the subway. We were going to a museum, just a typical Saturday outing. "You'll like your new home. The weather is beautiful out there."

He looked up at me. "It isn't fair, is it? For her to take me so far away."

"She's trying to do her best for you. She loves you."

"But you love me, too."

"You know I do."

"Will you come visit me?"

"We'll make some kind of arrangement."

"Promise?"

"Yes, I promise."

Down in the subway, we bought our peanuts from the blind man, and Donny stood there for a long moment, looking at him silently. And the blind Wilbur knew, he *felt* the difference in my son.

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"Is something wrong?" he asked.

Donny tucked the peanuts into his pocket. "I'm going away," he said. "I won't come here any more. My Mom is taking me away."

"Ah," said the blind man.

Then Donny turned, tugging at my hand, and we walked off with a surge in the crowd. But he was in more of a rush than I; he walked too fast, lost my hand, and disappeared among the hurrying people. I called his name. I dodged among the walkers, craning my neck for a glimpse of him. I let myself be swept to the platform; I crisscrossed it, calling, calling. He wasn't there.

I ran back to the tunnel, to the blind man.

He was gone. His peanuts were gone, his cigar box, his campstool. All gone.

I went through the motions. What else could I do? I found a cop, and he called some more cops, and they made a methodical search of the station. They couldn't find him. They suggested he might have been kidnapped, and a bulletin went out on him. Too soon I had to call Sheila and listen to her scream at me over the phone. She had always known it would happen, she said. Always. Shortly after that, the police arrested me on a kidnapping charge. There were court dates and lawyers then, but no one could prove anything. No ransom note ever came. No body was ever found. Sheila finally moved to the Coast with her new husband. He was angry, too, but only for her sake. He had a couple of children by a prevous marriage and couldn't get worked up over a stepchild.

Of course I knew where Donny was. Though the shadowed alcove contained only a blank wall when I passed it, I knew. But I couldn't very well tell anybody. *My son has turned into a mouse.* No.

Things blew over at last. Sheila was gone, and the police stopped following me around, and life settled back to its old routine, except for Saturdays. I still passed the blind man every day on my way to work. He had been there all the time, hadn't missed a day. I stopped for peanuts sometimes. I said Hello. He knew who I was. He looked toward me in a special way; as if he could see, as if he were waiting for me to say something, to do something. I didn't, not while I was being watched, and not for a long time afterward. But a day came, a Saturday when I was going to a ball game by myself — a day came when the crowds weren't quite as thick as usual, when I stopped for peanuts and I said, "I'd like to see him."

The blind man smiled. "He always asks about you."

"Today?" I said. "Now?"

"I think we can manage that."

The doorway was there, the stairs, the tunnel, the other stairs, and then we were in that mass of crumpled paper that was the mouse people's haven. I felt disoriented as I walked through that strange forest. The pathway seemed unfamiliar, twisting and turning confusingly, as if the whole thing had been re-engineered

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while I was gone. The open space at the end was different, too — long and narrow. There was a rise in the floor on the far side, and two couches set on the rise. They looked comfortable, upholstered in some soft material, with low backs and curving arms. They looked incongruous — furniture amid crumpled paper.

On one couch was a young woman, a lovely creature with pale skin and long fair hair; she wore a sleek blue gown and great masses of jewelry, a pirate's trove of gold and gems. On the other couch was a young man, a sturdy, muscular fellow in red velvet. On his head was a gold coronet. He looked familiar. He looked a little like the face I saw in the mirror every morning.

I remembered the lunch that had taken no time at all. No *outside* time.

He stood as I approached. He knew me right away. "Daddy," he said softly.

I tried to smile. My voice wasn't quite steady as I said, "Hello, Donny." He held out his hand and I shook it. A man's hand, not the small paw I had known. It was hard to believe that my little boy was gone, replaced by this man who answered to his name. And then he was hugging me, and I was hugging him, and it was strange, very strange, that he could reach all the way around me. We loosened our grip on each other at last, and I looked up at the crown on his head. "You're king around here?"

He grinned and took the crown off and tossed it on the couch, the throne. "It's a game," he said. "Some of the young people play it. It's just illusion anyway; the crown's the ring from a pop-top can." He waved at the woman, still sitting on her own couch, watching us with great dark eyes. "This is Mila, Daddy. My friend."

"Hello, Mila," I said.

She smiled.

"She's really a mouse," said Donny, "so she doesn't talk. But she makes a terrific-looking human."

I stared at her, trying to imagine that slender form as a plump gray mouse, failing. But I didn't ask him to dispel the illusion. I wasn't ready for that.

"Have you come to stay with us?" Donny asked me. "You'll like it here. The people are marvelous. The mice, too."

I looked into his eyes. I seemed to see him as child and adult all at once, as son and stranger. "How long has it been for you, Donny?"

"Almost twenty years."

I shook my head. "Only two for me."

"They explained it to me pretty early, but I didn't understand till one day I noticed that Wilbur never got any older. Then I knew why you hadn't come to visit."

"It was to protect you," I said. "The police were following me. They thought I had ... done something with you."

He looked away from me. "I'm sorry, Daddy. I never meant to make trouble for you."

Softly, I said, "Why did you do it, Donny? You frightened your mother terribly."

"You didn't tell her?"

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"How could I?"

He shrugged. "I don't know if I can explain how I felt. Pulled in two directions. Helpless. I loved you both, really. You *do* believe that?"

I nodded.

"But I was frightened. Everything was going wrong. I wanted it all to *stop*. There was only one way out, don't you see?"

Looking at him, I thought I could see. It was our fault, really, Sheila's and mine, because neither of us was willing to let go of him. "Tell me about the last twenty years," I said. We have so much to catch up on."

We spent hours together, though my watch said it was only minutes. He told me about his life and his friends, both mice and people. They had gotten other recruits since Donny's arrival, and some of the human women had had children; but their human population was still low, and they would be happy to take in more. Only a few real mice were allowed among them, as special pets. The sole danger to all was the poison occasionally left by the city workers, but it was so obvious in appearance that the humans, at least, had no trouble avoiding it. There was plenty of safe food in the subway; they all took turns going out to the tunnel floor as mice and foraging. Time resumed a more ordinary pace for them out there, so they always hurried, not wanting to leave their friends waiting long.

"From the edge of the warren," he said, "you can see the trains pass in slow motion. *Very* slow. But you can't hear them: the sound is too low-pitched for our ears, they tell us."

"They?"

"We've got some smart people down here. They've given me a pretty fair education."

A bit self-consciously, I put my arm around his shoulders. "You could get a better one on the outside. Why don't you come back with me?"

He looked surprised. "Are you going back?"

"Of course."

"You'd like it here, Daddy. Why don't you stay?"

I shook my head. "It's not for me. It's too ... different. It's easy for a kid to adjust, but I'm not a kid."

"Most of our recruits come to us as adults."

"Donny, I know what I've got up there, and I don't want to give it up."

"Did you remarry?"

"No." I laughed. "It really hasn't been very long for me."

"Sorry. I keep thinking of you as ... old."

"Do I look old?"

"No. You look just like I remember. Just like you should. And when you come back for your next visit ... *I'll* be the one who's old."

"I won't wait that long."

"Even if you come back every one of *your* weeks, you'll see me age; and from my point of view, you'll always stay the same." He shook his head, but smiled. "It's like relativity, a little."

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"Have they taught you about *that* down here?"

"We have a college physics teacher with us. I think you'd like him."

"I'm sure I would. But ... why don't you come back with me?"

His smile faded. "No. No, I can't do that."

"Oh, come on. Just for a visit. We'll catch a movie — you don't get movies down here, do you? Maybe a ball game. Don't you miss them?"

He shrugged. "It's an interesting life without all that stuff."

"You could have both. Your mother isn't going to take you back. She wouldn't even know who you are. A guy I hang around with sometimes — that's not her little boy. She'd never guess."

He looked at my eyes. "No, Daddy," he said. "I can't."

"Can't?"

"It's physically impossible."

"What do you mean?"

"The amount of food I eat down here can't support the mass of a human body. I lost mass, lived off it, until I reached the point where my intake *could* support me. I only weigh a few ounces now, like an ordinary mouse. I can't go back to my old size. If I went out with you, I'd be a six-inch-high human. It's been tried, believe me. Once you've been here a while, you have to stay."

Shocked, I whispered, "Did they tell you that at the beginning?"

He nodded. "They told me that if I stayed, it would be forever. And here I am."

"But ... but what if you change your mind?"

"The process takes a few months of subjective time. I could have gone back and just been ... thin. I had my chance. But I wanted to stay. I love these people, Daddy. They're kind, good. They're happy."

I looked hard at him. "And *you're* happy?"

"Yes." He smiled. "Yes."

He introduced me to the other adult humans — to the physics teacher and the advertising executive and the commodities broker; to the insurance agent and the lawyer and the Ph.D. candidate; to the woman I had met before, whose hair was now gray. It took her a minute to remember me. We had a party, and everyone laughed and joked. They seemed easy going and genuinely cheerful, and no one had to leave because of work or an early appointment. But at last I began to yawn.

They walked me to the stairway, all of them. I had lost track of the blind man sometime in that endless afternoon, but now he was waiting for me, standing on the second step.

"This is where we leave you," said Donny. "Take good care of him, Wilbur?"

The blind man nodded and began to tap his way up the stairs with his cane. I followed. I looked back once, to wave, but they were all gone, vanished into the crazy paper forest.

The routine of my life is pretty well set these days. On Saturdays I visit Don-

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ny, and he tries to convince me to stay. He's older than I am now, and I know that I'll lose him in a few more years. But I'd have lost him anyway if Sheila had taken him with her. He made his choice, and I've made mine, and my feeling for him isn't going to make me give up everything and become a mouse. After all, we *are* both adults. We have our separate lives. I like my work ... well enough ... and there's a strong possibility that I'll get my boss's job when he retires. That will mean more responsibility, but I look forward to it; I think I can handle it.

And if ever I can't ... if ever it gets to be too much, and I find myself as lost and helpless and desperate as Donny was, I'll know, as he did, that there's a way out. Meanwhile, I buy peanuts from Wilbur every day.

Not for myself, of course. Not for myself.

"The bad news is we're worms. The good news is worms being entry level for reincarnation we have no way to go but up."

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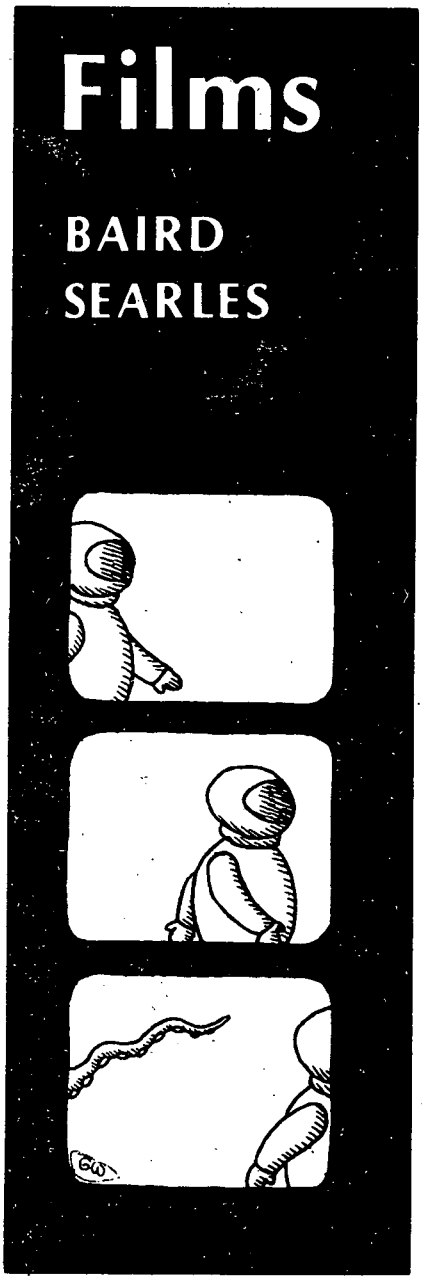
Films

BAIRD SEARLES



Drawing by Gahan Wilson

E.T., GO HOME

Better late than never, they say. Given the number of movies clamoring for coverage this year — all lumped together during one release period — something had to be put off. For several reasons, that thing was *E.T.*

To begin with, let's assume that everybody has seen it, so I won't do the usual of giving some idea of what it's about. Apologies to the brave souls that *haven't* seen it. Read on, however; you'll be compensated with the satisfaction of knowing what you've avoided.

Primarily that consists of feeling like a lump of taffy at a taffy pull; seldom have I felt so manipulated in my life. All art is manipulation in a way. The writer/painter/filmmaker wants you to feel *this* and so he does *that*; if it works, he's successful. But part of the art of manipulation is doing it so that the manipulatee doesn't know it's happening. Stephen Spielberg, as he has demonstrated all too often before, is absolutely blatant about it; I feel the resentment of a display dummy being put into position in a shop window.

E.T. is very simply the helpless abandoned infant story that goes back to the silent film and before that, the heyday of Victorian melodrama. If it had been done today with a kitten or puppy, it would have been dismissed as the bottom of the Disney pits. *But* ... we are given a whole new thing as

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the abandoned creature, something that is not immediately identifiable as cute and cuddly. It is, in fact, presented as initially ugly and grotesque; how virtuous one feels when one is forced to see beyond that (it's the eyes, of course; how can those big Bambi eyes be resisted?).

I was told by the gentleman at my local cigar store that *E.T.* wasn't really a science fiction film; it was really about love. My uneasy response to that is that the public these days feels that there is nothing left on Earth to love; nothing arouses the response that kittens, puppies, colts, and human waifs used to, and Spielberg was clever enough to realize that only something extraterrestrial would get those tear ducts flowing. Certainly there has been nothing like the scene where I.T. — sorry — E.T. is dragged back from the jaws of death by the power of love since the 1940s, when such actresses as Greer Garson kept proving that the power of love could cure everything from Kleptomania to myasthenia gravis.

As usual in this column, a twofold decision must be made. Is it a good movie, and is it good science fiction or fantasy? No on the first because it is obvious and fundamentally old hat, though we're not used to anything quite so cliched being given such expert treatment (some positive words on that aspect anon). No on the second, too. Spielberg specializes in pop sci-fi, science fiction for the masses. I don't hold it against the film that it's simple — simple need not be bad, as *Star Wars* demonstrated. But there are simply irrational aspects of the film that good s/f should not have, and they are not necessarily nits to be picked — they are major questions. For instance, why did E.T. have to phone home to get the ship to come for him, since it was perfectly obvious that they knew he had been left at the beginning, Mother standing at the screen door calling and all? (Don't give me an answer from the novelization — I have the feeling that's why so many novelizations of movies are being bought these days — to answer the questions the holes in the scripts have raised.)

For a real science fictional handling of this theme, find a story by Theodore Sturgeon called "Mewhu's Jet" that dates from 1946. In it a family comes across a crash-landed alien whose behavior seems even more eccentric than one would expect from a crash-landed alien. Only slowly does it dawn on them that it is not an *adult* alien...

Before being accused of being even more of a Scrooge than I have the reputation of being (disliking *E.T.* these days is tantamount to being against motherhood in the pre-Philip Wylie period), there are some positive things to be said; one can admire the culinary artistry that goes into *marrons glaces* even if one is rendered slightly ill by them.

Certainly the performance turned in by Henry Thomas as the youngest

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boy, Elliott, is one of the most extraordinary I've ever seen from a child actor. His dry-mouthed attempts to call his mother and brother when first approached by E.T. are excruciating, and he carries the longest farewell scene since *Romeo and Juliet* nobly. His "Stay!" to E.T.'s "Come!" nearly got me, manipulation or not — as did the dog's attempt to board. I also liked the mother's laugh of delight at the rainbow vapor-trail of the departing ship.

The flying bicycle was a Disney-esque touch that worked once. To repeat it, with five bicycles against the sun instead of one against the moon, was pushing it. And leaving part of the plastic passageway attached to the truck as it careered through the streets was inspired.

So it's a kids' movie. The fact that it has been such a hit with adults is troublesome. More and more, and particularly with this year's crop of films, the image of science fiction as kid stuff is being reinforced. When pray tell, are we to get an adult s/f film that contains material that's a little more intellectually and emotionally demanding than what we have here?

And, let me add for those out there who are now doubting that this reviewer has any capacity for emotion whatsoever, that, yes, I have been known to be moved — to tears, even — by certain movies. I have wept at *2001*, *On the Beach*, and *Lassie, Come Home* (the original) both on first run and on seeing it again a couple of years ago. Now *there's* manipulation.

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Charles Grant's first story here since "Pride," (May 1982) is about the twisted connection between a politician and a painter, and a terror that begins on a soft spring evening in Oxrun Station. Mr. Grant's latest book is a novel, NIGHTMARE SEASONS (Doubleday), which also concerns strange happenings in the town of Oxrun station.

The Next Name You Hear

BY

CHARLES L. GRANT

The air and all it touches is gentle, calm, stirring as a lover from a deep remembering sleep. The new green of grass and leaf is little more than a faint tinted haze, the earth a brown that would pale by summer. From the orchards and farms back in the valley there is lowing, bleating, the harsh coughing of shed-bound machinery clearing its rusted throat; and children and couples stroll through the park as if the Station's fathers have just ordered it open after a century's hibernation.

It is spring. In Oxrun Station. But Avery Hamilton is dead nonetheless, and I am not ashamed to have been Death's apprentice.

We grew up together, Avery and I, joined the army the same afternoon back there in 1950, by some quirk of military bureaucracy were assigned to the same unit throughout the war, and were released within hours of each other the same Thanksgiving Day. I was wounded twice, Avery not at all though he was standing beside me both times it happened; both times as exposed as I, and both times unscathed. When we returned home he settled easily into his place on King Street, up from the hospital, and proceeded to discover, almost without effort, the proper way to invest his parents' legacies so that he never had to work a full day in his life. I became stationmaster for the railroad, trading one uniform for another and not minding it a bit.

Avery eventually became interested in politics and landed a seat on the Station Council whenever he felt like making some noise.

After a few months, and recalling some encouragement I'd had in school, I tried my hand at painting. Nothing fancy, nothing avant-garde, but within

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a few years I managed to become fairly well known with a few select clients. Though I never had a showing in New York or places like that, I was content enough to receive some not-too-inconsequential checks every so often to supplement my income. I don't claim to have led an exciting life, nor did I wish to. The war was sufficient. So I told myself I was happy, and Avery said I was hiding — no more clearly than one evening in 1956 at the Chancellor Inn. Since he was alone for a change, I took the bold liberty of sitting next to him at the bar. I had the morning paper in my pocket and unfolded it between us.

"A lot of garbage here about the conflict," I said, pointing at a small headline near the bottom of the page. "Seems like Gen Mac is in for some heavy weather."

Avery, a walrus from moustache to waistline, laughed. "Herb," he said, as though imparting a sad truth to an unsuspecting child, "the only difference between a war and a conflict is a politician running for reelection. You should know that. God, you should know that."

I had nothing to say. From the moment we'd first met, that first year of our teens, he was the cynic and I was the Great White Hunter of the elusive silver lining. And when he told me then I was simply hiding from it all (whatever "it all" was) out there at the depot, I disagreed; I just never went out of my way to examine the gutter.

Ten years later he asked me to do his portrait. "With all the warts, Herb," he told me. "Not like those so-called old masters who made their patrons much better than they were."

I should have protested. I didn't do portraits well enough — I could never get the eyes right, or the slip of a chin, the turn of a mouth. I was a landscape artist, a lover of Turner and Winslow, but I agreed to do Avery because, such as he was, he was my friend.

We decided I should begin as soon as I had the few commissions done that were still lingering on the easel. It took me several months, primarily because I'm not a rapid worker. I prefer to wait until I know I'm right before touching a single brush to canvas. Avery chaffed, but didn't push, and finally I was ready to start a series of preliminary sketches — charcoal and oils — and then the regular sittings at my small place on Arbor Street. By that time it was past winter and well into the next spring, and sometime during those interminable sittings, while he was waxing bitter about the state of the world and President Carter's place in it, he met Angela Partridge, fell in love with her and, by the summer of '77, married her. I didn't begrudge him, of course, even though Angela and I had been sort of seeing each other off and on for a couple of years. Avery was enthusiastic; I was quiet. Avery had money; I had little. And Avery, for all his solid weight (save for the jowls that quivered when he breathed), was one of

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those men who attracted the opposite sex without half trying.

It was, however, shockingly easy to learn to hate him. And I did, though the hate came in almost imperceptible installments.

At the end of the year I was done, and I brought it over to his home for his approval. We were in the living room, a massive place all beams and stone fireplace and mahogany-accented furniture. He placed it on the mantel and examined it carefully, as if he were checking a stock certificate for a forger's mistake. He stood here and there, in and out of the light, close by and away from the front door, while I stood beside the hearth and wiped my hands self-consciously against my worn trousers, my shirt. I didn't realize I was holding my breath until, at last, he nodded.

"The only thing is," he said then, reluctant doubt in his voice, "Those colors in the background. My god, Herb, they make me look like a saint."

"For crying out loud," I said, standing around to face the portrait, one hand in my hip pocket, the other pointing. "The golds there are needed to pick up your suit — which you wanted, not me, the faint greens are for your eyes, the reds over there for the flowers. They blend well, even if I do say so myself."

"I don't care, Herb. I don't like them."

My hand fisted tightly in my pocket. He noticed my agitation and cleared his throat quickly. "However," he said, laying on my shoulder a placating hand I wanted desperately to shrug off, "it's a damned fine piece of work, old friend. I'll be proud of it, that's for sure. Proud to have it hanging right here over the fireplace."

I left, only slightly mollified. Two days later I received his payment in full, a substantial one and more than I'd asked for. It rankled, in spite of our friendship. And it was foolish, I know that. Just as foolish as my losing my temper when I heard he was pressing the railroad to abandon its depot in Oxrun because of statewide fiscal crunches that, according to him, rendered it virtually obsolete. I stalked around the house like a child, looking for something to break, kicking at baseboards, at doors, finally slamming a glass down so hard on the kitchen counter it shattered in my hand. Drew blood. Made me stare wide-eyed at the red splatters on the gray-streaked Formica.

Little things like that, the last being a call I received on a Saturday in August, just last year. It was Angela, and she was worried. No. She was frightened.

"Herb, it's Avery. I think it's his heart." At forty-nine she was a year older than her husband and I, and her voice usually sounded as if she were twenty. That night, however, she was twenty years older. But no matter how she sounded, I knew she was lying. I let her sputter on for a while, listening to phrases that had vague somethings to

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do with a doctor, some pills, the way he acted when he was home. And when she was done, I asked her if he still kept the painting over the mantel. "What? What are you talking about, Herb?"

"I'm talking nonsense, of course, Angie, the same as you."

I waited, thinking perhaps she would hang up on me. I saw her often, and always with Avery, but I couldn't help thinking what it would be like if I were the husband; and Avery, the old family friend. It wasn't a torch I was carrying, exactly; it was more like a match I kept thinking somewhat distantly I might still get to light.

"He loves it, you know."

"No, he doesn't, don't lie to me, Angie."

I heard her catch her breath. "He's after the railroad again."

I nodded to the staircase next to the phone table. It figured. He hadn't had a good battle in months, so he told me, and now he was digging up one of his failures. He never gave up, that one, a quality I have admired in him since our high school days. And though it was a little thing, something hardly earth-shattering in terms of the world's fate, I knew every time he saw his face looking down at him from my portrait work, he remembered. Friends or not, he didn't like losing.

"He...." Her voice caught, a sob trapped in rising. "Last night he started drinking. He hit me, Herb. The first time since we've been married." Her laugh was forced. "Didn't even make a bruise."

"I'll be right over."

"No!" And I could see her clutching the receiver, glancing fearfully toward Avery's study at the back of the house. "That's not the point, Herb."

I closed my eyes. Sometimes I just did not understand her. Her husband slaps her, and that's not the point. It didn't make sense, and I told her so, angrily.

"He didn't apologize," she said then. "He got up this morning and went out for a while, and he did not apologize."

I could hear it then, plainly — love dying.

"He thinks you and I have been having an affair."

Love .. dead.

I told her not to worry, he was drunk and he probably didn't remember and if she would excuse me I had work to get out before morning since my vacation was over. She didn't argue. I don't know what she expected of me, but I couldn't help disappointing her. I just couldn't talk any longer, not without starting some uncharacteristic screaming. So I went back to my studio and I set up a canvas.

Calm thyself, idiot, I ordered silently, and I set to work on something. I didn't know what it was, don't know now what I intended. But when I was done, just before dawn some ten hours later, ten hours without a break, the only noise my breathing and the

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slap of the brush, I stepped back and realized that I was drenched in perspiration. My shirt was plastered darkly to my chest and spine, my hair was dripping, even my shoes felt as if I'd been wading in a pond.

And the canvas.... I still have it and I still don't know what it was supposed to be. Maelstrom was the first word that came to mind that morning — grays and blacks and browns, that's all. As though I were looking through a dirt-streaked window at an autumn twilight thunderstorm. It frightened me a little, primarily because of Avery. Avery, who had told me silver linings always popped up in my work, even if the settings were that of a graveyard.

But there were no silver linings here. There was no color. I panicked a little, though I don't know why, and I grabbed a clean brush—and made a swipe at my palette, a swipe at my canvas. Silver. By god, it was silver, a five-inch-long diagonal of glaring bright silver.

I hurried back into the kitchen and made myself some coffee. Freud, I thought, could retire on what he might make out of that thing. I shook my head and drank without thinking, burned my tongue and started laughing at the idiot I was making of myself. I must have been tired. More tired than I'd thought. I called Angela before I realized she must still be in bed, talked to her a moment and told her I'd be coming over after work, late, to see if I could find out what was bothering my friend. Then I was gone, thanking my muses for a slow day and a chance to doze on the chair I kept on the platform.

Avery came by just after dinner, long after the commuter train had disgorged its passengers and was gone. I nodded, not rising, a cigarette loosely held in my hand. He was wearing brushed suede loafers, knee socks, Bermuda shorts, and a short-sleeved shirt open halfway down his chest. Tanned. Still a walrus.

"I hear Angela talked to you yesterday."

"She mentioned a spat you two had."

We looked up and down the tracks.

"I had too much to drink," Avery said. Then he shoved his hands into his pockets and chewed hard on his lower lip. "I, uh, sold the portrait this afternoon, Herb. A fella from Boston has been after me for years to sell it. Paid me three times what I paid you."

I rocked the chair until its back hit the station house wall, hooked my ankles around the front legs and said nothing. There was a warmth about my neck, however, and I found it hard to breathe.

"Well?" He turned to me and scowled. "Well?"

"Well what? It's your painting, Avery."

He rubbed the back of his head, his

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throat, his stomach. He took a step toward me, backed away and strode hard-heeled to the edge of the platform. "Damn you," he said quietly. "Damn you, Herb, don't you feel anything at all?"

"Sure. Right now I could probably slit your throat."

He didn't laugh. He only sighed, loudly. "That's your trouble, old friend, and as a friend I should have told you this long ago. You just get by, you know that? You have a respectable talent, you're not bad looking, and you've been sitting on this goddamned platform since we got out of the army. Christ, that's nearly twenty-five years, and you're not even fifty yet! I've been trying, you know, but you just don't want to move, do you?"

"Trying what?" And then I knew. "The railroad."

"It was the only way, other than marrying Angela, that I could think of to get you off your ass. Hell, Herb, I think I give up. I really thought you had something inside there." And he thumped his chest hard. "A mouse. A chipmunk."

"I could be a lion, you know," I said. "A gentle lion, just lolling around the veldt, waiting for something worth the effort."

"Crap," he said, and leaned back against one of the squared posts that supported the overhanging roof. "I used to believe we all had the killer instinct in us, if you know what I mean, and that some of us could more easily tap into it. Businessmen, lawyers, guys that really hit it big there, in other places. They go for the throat because they're not content with just being." He sighed again. "You, on the other hand, are a lost cause."

"Wait a minute," I said, standing slowly but keeping my distance. I remembered something. "You said ... married Angie? Because of me? Hit her?" I was puzzled. It was crazy. Friends are friends, but no man does something like that for another. No one.

"Partly," he said lightly.

"You bastard." I wasn't sure how serious I was.

"Yep. Partly." He grinned. "You want to do another portrait?"

"Go to hell."

He smiled. "You know something, Herb? When we were in Korea, the day you got hit? I was so goddamned mad I could have taken on the whole goddamn Chinese army right then and there. You remember what you said? You said you just had bad luck, that's all. Bad luck. You didn't even feel sorry for yourself. Jesus, Herb, you ever get the feeling there's something missing inside you?"

He left quickly with a nod and a wave, and I waited another hour before I headed for home. I walked. Slowly. Still not understanding everything I'd heard, and yet trying as hard as I could to reach down, far down inside me to see if he were right. But I couldn't. I didn't know how. And

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when I unlocked the front door I was trembling with frustration because I felt — only felt — perhaps Avery was right and I was missing something, something that might have made me more than I was. I headed straight for the studio then, and switched on the overhead light. The new canvas was still on the easel, and I stopped halfway across the room because I thought someone had taken a knife to it. I blinked and rushed forward, slowing only when I realized with an embarrassed grin it was only the inch-wide swath of silver I'd added on when I'd finished, It took the faint light and glittered, gave itself a depth that wasn't there, a darkness in its center that only made it seem as if I could see right through it.

My stomach growled and reality returned and I had just finished drying my dinner dishes when Angela called to tell me Avery had suffered a stroke on the way home from talking to me.

I was at the hospital in less than ten minutes. Angela was at the nurses' station, and when she saw me I thought for a moment she was going to collapse in my arms. Instead, she took hold of my hands and held them, tightly. She was cold. Her eyes were dark-pouched and her lips were bloodless.

"Is he...?"

She shrugged.

"You want some coffee?"

"He felt it coming," she said without emotion, "and he pulled over. Fred Borg found him and brought him here. I don't know. I don't know." She looked up at me, pleading. "I don't love him, but I don't want him to die."

I pried her hands loose and brushed her hair away from her eyes. Then I walked down the corridor and stood in his doorway. No one stopped me, so I stepped in. He was lying there, wires and gauges and monitors and tubes, and my shoe scuffed the floor; he looked up.

"Who...." A voice from a great distance. Weak. Hoarse. "Who are you?"

"Avery," I whispered, moving closer to the bed. "Avery, it's me, Herb."

He shook his head painfully. Closed his eyes. Opened them. "No, you're not."

I wanted to weep, but I insisted on telling him who I was again. He shuddered a deep breath and blinked rapidly.

"Yes," he said faintly. "Now I can see the resemblence. You ...: is Angela ... please go away, whoever you are."

I retreated quickly, colliding with a scolding nurse who closed the door behind me and shoved me in Angela's direction. A chill that had crept over my shoulders wouldn't leave me, and I rubbed my arms for warmth. Then Angela told me there was no need to stay, I'd better go home, she'd be all right. I didn't argue. Avery. After all these years, one simple malfunction and he didn't know me.

I wept that night. For the times we had had, and the sudden realization

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that, like Angela, I didn't love him anymore because of what he had said, what he had done, trying to make us both into something we weren't. And it frightened me, because I should have felt guilty for it, should have examined more closely my motives for the.... I'm not sure it was hate, but it was close enough to wonder. But there was no guilt. There was, rather, a sense of near-satisfaction that Avery was finally getting a measure of all that he'd given.

I couldn't sleep, and perhaps that was in fact guilt. And excitement. A curious excitement that terrified me, and drew me, had me wandering through the house without seeing, without hearing, until I reached the studio and saw the broad strip of silver across the new painting. Again it startled me, and again I needed time to see what it was. A reaction to Avery's stroke, of course, and I moved on. Outside now, and walking through shadows that twisted away at my approach, watching nightthings in the trees and cars on the road and neighbors on their porches. Nothing changed. Except Avery was dying.

Avery, who had hated my portrait, who was condescending about my work, who had taken my love just to goddamned make me angry.

At three in the morning he died and Angela called me.

I walked to the hospital and found her trembling and wan in a plastic chair outside his room. There were nurses and interns doing whatever nurses and interns do with the dead, and I sat beside her. She wouldn't take my hand. Her eyes were dry.

"I am two months shy of fifty years old," she said to the air in front of us, in a voice so soft I had to lean close to hear. "I am a widow. A widow. I didn't love him, and now I have to wear black because he was my husband." She turned on me, her right hand gripping my wrist like a razored talon. "You could have had me, you know. If you'd had the guts, Herb, it could have been us." I could see it in her eyes — not yearning, not regret, but a hatred against waste.

The chill left me; I was hot. Very hot.

Angela suddenly clamped a hand to her mouth and rose, looked at me in confused horror, then rushed down the corridor. My mouth opened to call her, closed again when she ran past the elevators and pushed through the fire door. I followed, shivering now as if I were suffering from a fever, the colors of the hospital blurring and changing, my stride lengthening, my breath oddly calm.

As I hit the door with my palm I felt a shock tear along my spine, and I stumbled over the threshold. Over, I thought as I dropped to my knees. My god, Avery and me, still together at the end.

But it wasn't the end.

The burning, and the chills, and the blurred vision vanished. I grabbed on-

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to the metal railing and pulled myself to my feet, saw Angela backed into the corner behind the now closed door. Her hands went to her cheeks, her mouth open in a silent scream.

"Who *are* you?" she said, her knees giving slightly.

I didn't know, but I intended to find out. And I did. After I took hold of her arm and threw her down the stairs. Watched her hit the landing below and slide hard against the wall. Her neck broke instantly. Her eyes fluttered, her tongue protruded, and a thin trickle of blood slipped between her lips.

I grinned. And it felt ... just fine.

Then I walked down past her, kicking aside a foot as I did, and went outside. The air was nice, was cool, was soft. I made my way home and went directly to the studio. To the foot-wide silver slash over the canvas I had covered. A minute, no more, and I finally knew what it was.

Grays and browns and blacks unrelenting.

In a moment of intense dark emotion — the self-portrait of a man who had not lived until the man who did live finally opened his soul. The slash of silver had acted as a knife, an ironic silver lining that eventually freed the bile. Freed the hate. Freed the contempt.

Herb, of course, hadn't known what he was doing, and wouldn't have believed it if he had. He was gentle, he was kind, and Avery had been right in every respect — he got by without touching any of his work with black.

But Herb's dead now. He never learned to cope with the dark, with the black.

He's dead, and I'm here, sitting in the kitchen sharpening all the knives. Feeling young again, feeling strong, anxious to go out and introduce myself to the world.

I haven't a name yet, but you'll know it when you hear it. I'll whisper it in your ear. Tonight. While you're dreaming.

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Like the Linda Blanchard story elsewhere in this issue, R. Bretnor's piece deals with a problem associated with cryogenic suspension. And these are not minor bugs, they are mind-bending, major questions. So think twice before opting for the freezer.

Cryogenesis

BY

R. BRETNOR

Dr. Milo Cade never divorced Millicent, not because her money had put him through med school, not because her family's position had made it possible for him to set up the Cade-Grabow Clinic, not even because she had borne and raised his children.

One of the reasons he did not divorce her was because he was financially too prudent. Divorce would have meant property settlements, payments, lawyers' fees. As it was, he had his occasional affairs, discreet and inexpensive and without responsibility. The more money he made — and he made a lot of it — the less he liked to spend.

But there was more than that. Ever since the first hot years of their marriage and his success, they had drifted further and further from each other — and the more estranged they were, the more he needed her.

He needed her as some men need a punching bag, some women a psychic pincushion. As his character was molded, hers changed in her revulsion to it. Once she had come down to his office, walking through the sad and anxious people waiting there in hope and fear, in despair and pain, staring stolidly at the tasteless pictures on the walls, turning the pages of dull, dead magazines without seeing them, all waiting patiently — no wonder they were called patients! — and she had found him playing gin rummy with a pharmaceutical detail man. Later, at home, she had taxed him with it, and he had told her brutally to keep her damn nose out of his business. A doctor, especially a first-rate surgeon, had to establish his authority, his ascendancy; there must be no idiotic softness in the image he projected to the world. "Let 'em wait! It's good for

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'em," he'd told her. "It's like dog-training. Kick 'em and they sit up and yap for you. Pat their little heads and they take a bite out of your leg. *I* haven't had any malpractice suits, have I?"

And it was true: he hadn't. She came to realize that she had married, not a healer, but an excellent technician, a skilled mechanic with no love for the machines he worked on. The kids grew up. They left for college, for new homes and wives and husbands, but somehow even then she could not leave him. She began to interest herself in causes — save this, save that, save whales and porpoises and useless birds. It infuriated him, and he crushed her interest with sneers in public and lectures in private on the survival of the fittest. She tried religion, which made him doubly furious, arousing a scathing, cold contempt against which she could not contend. She had always been a soft and mild and loving and unresisting woman.

When her last long, lingering, painful illness finally was diagnosed and the truth told to her, even then he did not relent. Once he came upon her reading a paperback by Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, about people clinically dead who had revived to tell, one after another, of separating from their bodies, of being consciously aware of what went on around their deathbeds or in the surgery, of being greeted by old friends and relatives. He looked down at her, his eyes merciless under their formidable brows. Without a word, she handed him the book to tear in half.

"Crap!" he said. "I've seen plenty of 'em die. I know what happens when the engine stops. Why kid yourself?"

Uncomplainingly, she endured the futile ritual of surgeries and painful therapies, and whenever she had to spend an hour or two waiting for one of his colleagues to examine her, she looked at the human beings who surrounded her and thought of him. Then, one day after she had dwindled to a pale rag of what she once had been, she read an article on cryogenics and showed it to him. "It'd be like — like being born again," she whispered, hesitantly.

"Well, it makes more sense," he grunted, "though damn little more." But he promised her that he would make all necessary arrangements; she would be frozen at the instant of her death, to be awakened, resurrected, fifty, seventy, a hundred years from now, when they had found a cure for her disease; and she died, quietly and uncomplainingly, believing him.

But cryogenics was expensive; he had no faith in it; he made no arrangements. He rode back from her funeral mentally counting her insurance and making plans for his own future.

Three months later, having vacationed for six weeks in Mexico and Guatemala with a married patient whose husband's profession took him on conveniently long trips to Europe

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and East Asia, he settled down again into the routine of his practice. And three days after that, having performed a prolonged and unexpectedly difficult procedure on a subject already doomed, he collapsed suddenly and dramatically in the elevator. He did not lose consciousness. His legs simply folded under him. Then every nerve tightened; he sweated, solid beads of sweat; abrupt chills shook him; when the elevator stopped, when they brought a gurney to put him on, he could scarcely force his clenched teeth to open so that he could answer his assistant surgeon's questions.

They put him in the hospital's best room, the one the nurses called the Presidential Suite. For the first time, he found that he was not in charge; he tried to give the orders, but Alex Grabow was hovering at his bedside, and young Vagnes, whom they'd just taken in. They took his temperature: 106.8. They didn't want to tell him, but naturally he had already read it. The night passed: test after test, chills, hideous fevers, nerve spasms, sweats, nightmares. Sleeping pills were useless.

Next day the specialists came, first local men, like Goldman, Aberswith the epidemiologist, whom he detested, and Kuroda, who had weird ideas about heredity and DNA. They came, and asked their questions, and finally went away, shaking their heads. Next day, the out-of-towners started to come in, from the National Institute of Health, from God knew where — institutes of tropical medicine? Obscure research foundations no one had ever heard of? They too asked questions. Where had he been? Mexico. Guatemala. Where in Mexico? Yucatan. The jungle? Yes, the god-damned jungle, what of it? And in Guatemala? More of the same: jungle, ruins. Had anything bitten him? Of course, mosquitoes, bugs, even something he could not identify, leaving two puncture marks instead of one.

They too shook their heads and went away. And the days and nights went by. His fever soared and plummeted; nerve spasms and sudden rigors came, bringing nausea. They destroyed his sleep, letting him writhe for fifteen minutes, half an hour, an hour, and went away only to return. In eleven days, he had lost more than eighty pounds.

At his insistence, he was shown all his data — all meaningless. There was no diagnosis. Whatever had attacked him was unknown and undetectable. Life support systems failed to slow his obvious deterioration. He lay there, struggling silently, thinking of all the plans that he had made, of what would happen to everything he had accumulated. He decided he would not relinquish it so easily.

He had his lawyer summoned. Between his terrible spasms, he managed to dictate a new will. To his children, he left just enough to ensure that they would not challenge it. He ordered that his interest in the clinic should be sold,

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letting Grabow have an option — setting a high price but one fair enough so he'd be sure to take it up. Then he established a perpetual trust and made the arrangements with the cryonics people — the arrangements he had denied to Millicent.

If it worked, it would indeed be like being born again — he smiled wryly to himself — cryogenesis?

Two days later, he had them called and, with Grabow at his side, removed the life support equipment with his own hands. Grabow made no attempt to interfere, and Dr. Cade's last thought before he died was whether it was because of kindness, professional courtesy, or greed.

He remembered dying, the final pain, the exact instant of it. Now his first thought was to wonder how much time had passed, how many years, decades, centuries? He was aware. He could see. He seemed to be floating vaguely over a body to which people were doing things.

It seemed to him that no time at all had passed; then he recalled that there could be no time, and no awareness of time, in the timeless nothingness of death. The people there were strange to him, but wasn't that to be expected? His attention shifted, and suddenly he found himself out in the open air, standing on his two feet.

Now he was certain that he dreamed. *I'm being thawed out,* he thought. *Perhaps when they get us out of the cryonic vaults, while warmth returns, while we're being brought back to life.... That must be it!*

Triumph surged through him. He, Milo Cade, had cheated death.

He still was in the dream, clearly, vividly. There was a graveled path before him, and he was walking down it. He became conscious of people to either side, strolling, sitting quietly on the grass. He thought he recognized a face or two — old Henderson, who'd died abruptly just after Millicent, and another, and still another. For an instant, it troubled him, but he remembered that one dreamed as often of the dead as of the living.

Then toward him, between rows of flowers, a woman came. She was tall, with graying hair, dressed in white and pale blue, and she was beautiful, with a sweet, sad, infinitely compassionate face. Beside her walked a man younger than she, straight and strong.

"You are here, Milo Cade," she said, in a low, soft voice. "You are here, and *he* will see you now."

What the hell kind of a dream is this? Dr. Cade thought, but he let her take him gently by the arm.

For the first time, he saw that ahead of them was a vast, gleaming building. Low and graceful, it followed the graceful contours of the ground. They entered through a tall open portal, walking softly into a vaulted hall.

"*Who's* going to see me?" he asked the woman.

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She smiled. "We call him Dr. Charon," she replied.

Silently they walked; silently they passed others who nodded, smiling. They went by an enormous chamber filled with chairs, couches, tables piled with magazines and books. There were a few men and women there, but he scarcely glanced at them. He chuckled. Apparently professional courtesy extended even to his dreams. So the guy was going to see him right away. And hadn't the woman said he was a doctor? And how long did it take to defrost you and bring you back to life, anyhow? Ahead of them a door stood open. They entered. In a great chair a man sat, dressed very informally in white, a small table at his side. He was tremendous, tall and straight and mighty, with eyes that looked directly into Milo Cade; and Dr. Cade shivered with the certain knowledge that he could hide nothing from those eyes, nothing, nothing, nothing.

"You are here, Milo Cade," he said, and his voice filled the room. "You are here where all men come, but you've not come like other men."

Dr. Cade shrugged — dreams were funny things. Again he wondered how many years had passed since he'd been laid away.

The huge man smiled. "You think you're dreaming," he said, with pity in his voice. "But you are not. Only a few minutes have gone by since your death. Didn't you see them working on your body before we drew you here? Even now they're just preparing it for freezing. Let me explain — most of those who die find themselves glad to break the thread that ties them to their bodies. They come here, where we prepare them to go on, to learn, develop, and to live again. But you have chosen not to break the thread."

Dr. Cade listened. Fear seized him in its grip. He tried, as one does in nightmares, to wake himself. But he did not wake. And suddenly he realized, with a dread certainty, that it was no dream. "L-look here," he stammered, "this — this lady here said you're some kind of doctor?"

"I have been," the man said.

"Okay, then — for God's sake tell me what this is all about? Aren't they unfreezing me right now? Don't tell me you haven't found a cure."

The man sighed. "Milo Cade, they are *not* unfreezing you. Your body is being frozen now, just as you ordered, but you are linked to it. Unless it is destroyed, you will stay linked to it until it is unfrozen and reanimated, when you'll be drawn back to it. About this, there's *nothing* we or you can do. The disease you died of is extremely rare. It will not even be identified —" He glanced down at the table. "— for one hundred and seventy-four years. And the cure will not be found for another thirty-two."

He gazed at Dr. Cade, calmly, pityingly. He gestured to the woman. "Nurse," he said, "please take Dr. Cade to the waiting room."

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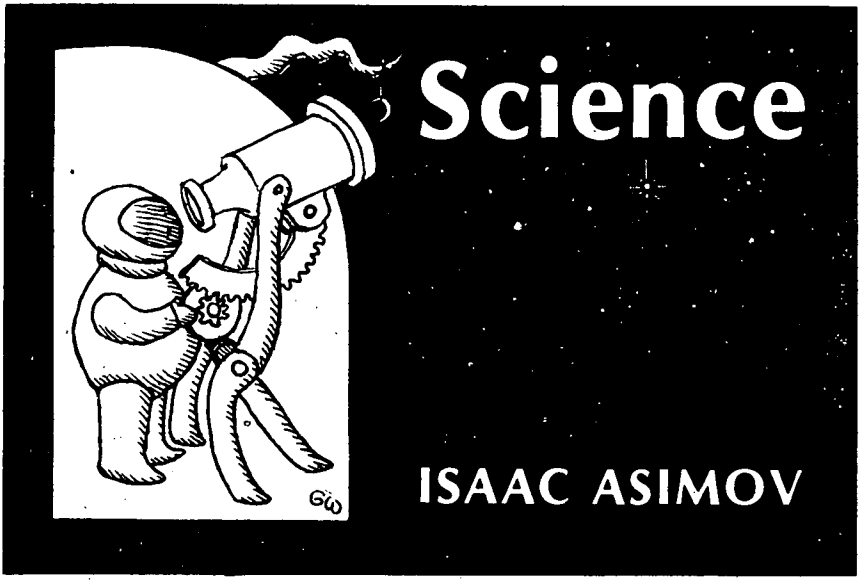

Drawing by Gahan Wilson

TO UNGILD REFINED GOLD

One of my less amiable characteristics is an impatience with misquotation, especially if it is from Shakespeare.

A sure way to induce the symptoms of apoplexy in me is to have someone who is doing a comic rendition of the passage from *Romeo and Juliet* say: "Wherefore art thou, Romeo?" with an intonation and action indicating that the meaning is "Where are you, Romeo?"

Not only does this indicate that the poor illiterates who are responsible have never read the play but that they don't even know the meaning of "wherefore," or — worse yet — assume that the audience neither knows nor cares.

A high follower in the list of misquoters whom I disesteem are those who speak of "gilding the lily."

That is a misquotation from Shakespeare's *King John*, Act IV, scene ii, where the Earl of Salisbury lists six actions that represent "wasteful and ridiculous excess" as a way of condemning King John's insistence on a second coronation. In each case, something is described that attempts to improve that which cannot be improved, and the first two examples are "to

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gild refined gold, to paint the lily."

The misquoter collapses the two and says "to gild the lily," an action which somewhat lacks the exquisite inappropriateness of the two actions as given by Shakespeare.

So as my way of fighting this annoyance I intend to demonstrate a way in which I can manage "To ungild refined gold." You'll see what I mean as I go on.

When I am trapped in an assemblage, and am restless, and am sure no one is eyeing me closely, I can sometimes rescue myself by playing with numbers: adding, subtracting, multiplying, dividing, and so on.

There is no point of my doing this, you understand, because I lack all trace of mathematical talent. What I do with numbers is to mathematics what piling one toy block on top of another is to architecture. But then, you see, I don't imagine myself to be doing mathematics; I am merely protecting my brain (a rather demanding organ) from damage through boredom.

I did this even when I was quite young, and I was about 12, I think, when I studied the relation of numbers to their squares in the following fashion:

$$1^2 = 1; \text{ and } 1 - 1 = 0$$
$$2^2 = 4; \text{ and } 4 - 2 = 2$$
$$3^2 = 9; \text{ and } 9 - 3 = 6$$
$$4^2 = 16; \text{ and } 16 - 4 = 12$$
$$5^2 = 25; \text{ and } 25 - 5 = 20$$
$$6^2 = 36; \text{ and } 36 - 6 = 30$$

By this time, I saw the regularity. If you go up the scale of integers, subtracting each integer from its square, the first integer will give you 0. You must then add 2 to get 2 for the next integer; add 4 to get 6 for the next integer; add 6 to get 12; add 8 to get 20; add 10 to get 30.

In producing the successive numbers, you go up the scale of even integers, so that I knew that the next number would be 42, and then 56, and then 72, without having to carry out the subtractions: $49 - 7$; $64 - 8$; and $81 - 9$. I was proud of myself.

I next tried something else. I wrote down each integer, and placed next to it the figure I got by subtracting it from its square and then considered how else I could represent the figure. Thus:

$$1 \quad 0 = 1 \times 0$$
$$2 \quad 2 = 2 \times 1$$
$$3 \quad 6 = 3 \times 2$$
$$4 \quad 12 = 4 \times 3$$

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$$5\ \ 20 = 5 \times 4$$
$$6\ \ 30 = 6 \times 5$$

It was clear to me that every integer subtracted from its own square gave a result that was equal to that same integer multiplied by the next smaller integer.

By now, my 12-year-old heart was beating quickly, for I got the idea that I had discovered something very unusual that, perhaps, no one had ever noticed before. (As I told you, I have no mathematical talent. Gauss would have noticed all this at the age of three, I imagine, and dismissed it as obvious.)

At any rate, I wanted to generalize this, for I was taking algebra now. I therefore let an integer, *any* integer, be "x." The next smaller integer would be "x − 1," and the square of the integers would by "x^2."

I had discovered, by massive brain-power, that an integer subtracted from its square, "$x^2 - x$," was equal to that integer multiplied by the next smaller "$x(x - 1)$." In other words:

$$x^2 - x = x(x - 1)$$

With that, all my joy left me, for this equation was indeed as obvious as anything could be. You just factored out the "x" on the left side, and that gave me the right side. The value of my discovery was equal to that of finding out that two dozen equalled twenty-four.

I therefore abandoned that particular line of discovery and never returned to it. And this was a shame, for had I continued to pry, I might conceivably have discovered something more which, while not exactly new, would have been far more interesting than the equation I just worked out for you. And since I'm a little over 12 now, I can manage it — so come along.

Suppose we consider the problem of subtracting an integer from its square for just the first three integers: $1 - 1 = 0$; $4 - 2 = 2$; and $9 - 3 = 6$.

The differences keep going steadily upwards so that we can tell that there are no subtractions of this sort that will ever give differences of 1, 3, 4, or 5. At least, not if we stick to integers.

We might, however, switch to the use of decimal fractions.

For instance, the square of 1.1 is 1.21, and $1.21 - 1.1 = 0.11$, while the square of 1.2 is 1.44, and $1.44 - 1.2 = 0.24$. If we continue going upward by tenths, we find that the square of 1.6 is 2.56, and $2.56 - 1.6 = 0.96$, which is quite close to 1. Then, too, the square of 2.3 is 5.29, and $5.29 - 2.3 = 2.99$, which is even closer to 3.

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In fact, we can guess, by now, that if we choose the proper decimal fraction, we can subtract that from its square and get a number pretty close to any integer we choose. Thus, the square of 4.65 is 21.6225, and 21.6225 − 4.65 = 16.9725, which is pretty close to 17.

None of the examples I have sighted give a difference that is an exact integer; they only come close. My 12-year-old self, if he were working this out, and were as clever as I wish he had been, might have thought that by adding more decimal places he could have hit an integer on the nose. Since $2.3^2 - 2.3 = 2.99$, it should seem reasonable to expect that a tiny upward adjustment of 2.3 would get me exactly three. For instance, $2.303^2 - 2.303 = 3.000809$. Now I'm just a trifle high, so down I go to $2.30275^2 - 2.30275 = 2.9999075$.

When I was 12, I would not have had a pocket calculator, so working out the above relationship would have taken me quite some time, riddled me with arithmetical errors, and worn me out. I would have quickly given up.

Suppose, however, I didn't. Suppose I had the guts and persistence to try more and more decimal places and to fill more and more pieces of paper with enormous calculations. I would have found that no matter how assiduously I tried, and how many hours (or years) I spent at it, I would never find any number with any quantity of decimal places which, when subtracted from its square would give me exactly 3. I would get closer and closer and closer, but nothing would place me exactly on 3.

There would then be two possible conclusions I could have come to: 1) If I were an ordinary boy, I would have decided that I just lacked the persistence to reach that final decimal place; 2) If I were a boy with the soul of a mathematician, I would have leaped intuitively to the notion that the number I was after was, actually, an unending and non-repeating decimal, and I might thus have caught my first glimpse — unaided — of irrational numbers. (Unfortunately, I was never even bright enough to get to the point where I had to make the choice, so I was sub-ordinary.)

As I went on in algebra, I discovered how to solve for "x" in equations of the following type: "$ax^2 + bx + c = 0$." In such an equation, "a," "b," and "c," the "coefficients", are integers, and "x" is unknown. It turns out that in such an equation:

$$x = (1/2a)\,(-b + \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}) \quad \text{(Equation 1)}$$

A couple of explanations: In Equation 1, the quantity in one parenthesis is to be multiplied by the quantity in the other parenthesis. Then, too, the symbol, $\sqrt{\ }$, stands for "square root." The "square root of x," or

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"$\sqrt{x}$", is that number which, when multiplied by itself, gives "x." Thus, $\sqrt{25} = 5$; $\sqrt{81} = 9$, and so on. (One more point: if the plus sign in Equation 1 is replaced by a minus sign, a second possible answer would be given, but we will deal with the plus sign only.)

To give an example of how Equation 1 works, suppose we deal with an equation such as "$x^2 + 8x - 5$." In that case "c" is equal to -5, and "b" is equal to $+8$. However, the plus sign is usually omitted in such cases and is considered to be "understood," so the "b" is said to be equal simply to 8.

But what is "a," the coefficient of "x^2," in the equation: "$x^2 + 8x - 5$"? It would seem that the "x^2" in that equation has no coefficient at all, but that is not so. The "x^2," standing by itself, is actually "$1x^2$," but the 1 is understood and is generally omitted. Nevertheless, "a," in this case, is set equal to 1. (Personally, I would never omit anything and would always write 8 as $+8$, and "x^2" as "$1x^2$," and for that matter "x" as "x^1," but that's not what mathematicians do. It's their amiable way of saving themselves trouble at the expense of making things a little more confusing for beginners, and you can't fight Faculty Hall.)

We are now ready to return to the matter of subtracting an integer from its square to get some desired difference. We can generalize the problem algebraically by letting "x" stand for any integer, "x^2" for its square, and "y" for the integer that is the difference. We would then write:

$$x^2 - x = y$$

To make it interesting, let's pick a specific integer for "y," so we can see how this works; and, to make it simple, let's pick the smallest integer, 1. The equation becomes:

$$x^2 - x = 1$$

It is possible to subtract 1 from each side of the equality sign without changing the nature of the equation. (That's the result of one of those good old axioms: Equals subtracted from equals are equal.)

If you subtract 1 from the left side of the equality you get "$x^2 - x - 1$". If you subtract 1 from the right side, you get $1 - 1$, which is equal to 0. So you can write the equation as:

$$x^2 - x - 1 = 0 \quad \text{(Equation 2)}$$

If you solve this equation for "x," you will have a number which, when subtracted from its square, will give you exactly 1.

For the purpose, we will use Equation 1. For "a," the coefficient of "x^2" we have 1, for "b" the coefficient of "x," we have -1, and for "c," the final coefficient, we have -1 again.

Since "b" is equal to -1, "$-b$" $= -(-1)$, or $+1$, which is written sim-

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ply 1. Again "b^2" = (−1) (−1), or +1, or 1, then "2a" is equal to 2. And since "a" = 1, and "C" = −1, "4ac" is equal to 4(1) (−1) or −4, and −4ac is equal to −(−4), or +4, or 4.

With all this in mind, we have all we need to know to substitute numbers for the symbols in Equation 1 (and forgive me if you didn't require this step-by-step explanation). Equation 1 therefore becomes:

$$x = 1/2(1 + \sqrt{1 + 4}) = 1/2(1 + \sqrt{5})$$

This is the number which, when subtracted from its square, will yield a difference of exactly 1.

To express the number as an ordinary decimal, you must take the square root of 5, add 1, and divide the sum by 2.

But what is the square root of 5? What is the number which, when multiplied by itself, will give 5? That, alas, is an irrational number, an unending and non-repeating decimal. We can get pretty close though, if we say it is 2.23606796.... In fact, we'll be close enough if we pretend that the square root of 5 is 2.236068. If we multiply this number by itself, 2.236068 X 2.236068, we get 5.0000001, which is off by only a ten-millionth.

If we add 1 to the square root of 5 and divide the sum by 2, we get 1.618034. (A still more correct value would be 1.61803398 ... but 1.618034 is quite good enough for our purposes.)

If you take the square of this number you find that 1.618034 X 1.618034 = 2.618034025156. The additional 0.000000025156 is the result of the trifling inaccuracy of the figure, 1.618034. No decimal, however long, could be anything but a trifle inaccurate. The only truly accurate figure is $1/2(1 + \sqrt{5})$. If you square *that* number, which can be done without much trouble, but which trouble I will spare you, you will get the quantity $1/2(3 + \sqrt{5})$, which is greater by *exactly* 1.

Suppose we consider "reciprocals" next. If you divide 1 by any number, you get another number that is the reciprocal of the first. In other words, 1/2 is the reciprocal of 2; 1/3 is the reciprocal of 3; 1/17.25 is the reciprocal of 17.25; and, in general, "1/x" is the reciprocal of "x."

Instead of subtracting a number from its square, let's subtract a reciprocal from its number. Using only integers, we have:

$$1 - 1/1 = 0$$
$$2 - 1/2 = 1\ 1/2$$
$$3 - 1/3 = 2\ 2/3$$
$$4 - 1/4 = 3\ 3/4, \text{ and so on}$$

Except for the case of 1, we would always get a fraction; but, again, we

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o not have to cling to integers. Suppose we want to find a number which, when we subtract its reciprocal, will give us a difference of exactly 1.

Clearly, it will have to be a number which lies between the integers 1 and 2, so that the difference will be somewhere between 0 and 1 1/2. Suppose, for instance, we take the number 1.5. Its reciprocal is 1/1.5. Since 1.5 = 3/2, and 1/1.5 = 2/3, we have 3/2 — 2/3 = 5/6, which is pretty close to 1. If we move to 1.6 and subtract 1/1.6, and if you trust me with the arithmetic, the answer is 0.975, which is even closer.

If we keep experimenting, however, we will quickly assure ourselves that we're not going to find any decimal we can write down which will give us *exactly* 1, when its reciprocal is subtracted. We are going to find ourselves in the realm of irrational numbers again.

So we switch to algebra and set up an equation that will represent the general case:

$$x - 1/x = 1$$

If we multiply each side of the equation by "x," the nature of the equation is left unchanged (trust me!). Since "x" times "x" is "x^2"; "1/x" times "x" is 1; and 1 times "x" is "x," we have:

$$x^2 - 1 = x$$

If we subtract "x" from each side of the equation, we have:

$$x^2 - 1 - x = 0, \text{ or, rearranging}$$
$$x^2 - x - 1 = 0$$

But this is Equation 2 again, and the solution for "x" must be the same as it was before. We already know that $1/2(1 + \sqrt{5})$ is exactly 1 less than its square. Well, it is also exactly 1 more than its reciprocal.

To show this plainly, let's deal with 1.618034, that very good approximation of $1/2(1 + \sqrt{5})$. It turns out that 1/1.618034 = 0.618034.

Now let's try again. Imagine a rectangle that is 1 unit wide and 2 units long. (It doesn't matter what the units are: inches, metres, light-years, whatever.)

In such a rectangle, the length is 2 times the width, obviously. The length and the width together, however, is 3 units, and that is 1 1/2 times the length.

If the rectangle were 1 unit by 3, then the length is 3 times the width, but the length and width together is 4, and that sum would be 1 1/3 times the length.

If the rectangle were 1 by 4, then 1 by 5 and so on, you would get pairs of figures that were 4 and 1 1/4, 5 and 1 1/5 and so on. The two numbers

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would move farther and farther apart in size.

Can we find a rectangle where the two numbers are equal in size?

If so, that would have to be one in which the width was 1 unit and the length less than 2 units (because at 2 units, the two numbers are already unequal).

Let's go straight to algebra. Suppose the width of the rectangle is 1 unit and the length is "x" units. To express how many times "x" is greater than 1, we divide "x" by 1, and write "x/1," or simply "x."

The sum of the width and the length of the rectangle is "x + 1." To express how many times this is greater than the length alone, we have "(x + 1)/x."

We are looking for a situation in which these two relative lengths, or "ratios," are equal, and so the equation we set up is:

$$x = (x + 1)/x$$

If we multiply both sides of the equation by "x," we don't change the nature of the equation and we have:

$$x^2 = x + 1$$

If we subtract "x + 1" from both sides, we don't change the nature of the equation and we have:

$$x^2 - (x + 1) = 0$$

We can remove the parenthesis if we take the negative of "x + 1" and make it "−x − 1" so that we have:

$$x^2 - x - 1 = 0$$

and there's Equation 2 again, with its usual solution.

Suppose, then, we have a rectangle in which the width is 1 unit and the length is 1.618034 units. The width and the length taken together would therefore be 2.618034. The length is, of course, 1.618034 times the width, while the length and width together would be 2.618034/1.618034, or 1.618034 times the length alone.

It was the ancient Greeks who discovered this. Essentially, it was a way of dividing a given line into two sections, the longer of which was to the shorter section, as the whole line was to the longer section. Mathematicians have been so ravished by the beauty of this balance of ratios that about the mid-19th Century, it began to be called the "golden section."

A rectangle in which the width and length represented a line divided by the golden section and bent into a right angle at the division point, was called a "golden rectangle."

Many people feel that the golden rectangle represents an ideal configuration that is particularly satisfying from an esthetic viewpoint. A long-

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er rectangle, they feel, looks too long, and a shorter one too stubby. Therefore, people have sought (and found) examples of golden rectangles in paintings, in statues, in buildings and in many common artifacts of our society. In books on popular mathematics, the reader is presented with illustrations showing this.

Frankly, I'm skeptical. My own feeling is that esthetics is a very complicated study and is enormously influenced by the social environment. To try to make much of the golden section in this respect is simplistic. I have only to see films made in the 1920's and 1930's. for instance, to be struck by the extent to which our ideas of female beauty (which one might casually think of as timeless) have changed in one lifetime.

I don't deny the golden rectangle is golden because of the mathematical elegance of the relationship of the sides, but trying to convert this into matters of esthetics is to gild refined gold, and I would like to contribute my own poor bit to ungilding it.

If we cling strictly to mathematics, we find that the golden section is to be found in such simple geometric configurations as the regular decagon (a symmetrical ten-sided figure) and the pentagram (the star you find in the American flag). Particularly interesting in this connection, however, is the Fibonacci series, something I dealt with in an earlier essay in this series (see T-FORMATION, August 1963). There I merely dealt with some of the large numbers that resulted. Here I will take up another aspect.

The Fibonacci series starts with two 1's and then generates new numbers by making each new one the sum of the two preceding ones.

Thus, if we start the series with 1, 1..., the third number is 1 + 1, or 2, and that gives us 1, 1, 2.... The next number is 1 + 2, or 3, and now we have 1, 1, 2, 3.... There follows 2 + 3, or 5, so we have 1, 1, 2, 3, 5.... Then comes 3 + 5 = 8, and 5 + 8 = 13, and so on. The first 21 terms of the Fibonacci series is, therefore:

1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, 233, 377, 610, 987, 1597, 2584, 4181, 6765, 10946....

We can continue to add additional terms indefinitely, if we are willing to add larger and larger pairs of terms, but these 21 will be enough for our purposes.

When the Fibonacci series was worked out (by an Italian mathematician named Fibonacci, of course) it involved biological growth. The initial problem dealt with multiplying rabbits in fact. And yet—

Suppose we consider the ratio of successive numbers in the Fibonacci

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series, dividing each number by the one before, starting with the second in the series, thus:

$$1/1 = 1$$
$$2/1 = 2$$
$$3/2 = 1.5$$
$$5/3 = 1.6666...$$
$$8/5 = 1.6$$
$$13/8 = 1.625$$

As you see, the ratio forms an oscillating series. The value of the ratio goes up from 1 to 2, then down to 1.5, then up to 1.6666..., then down to 1.6, then up to 1.625. We can be sure that this will go on, that the ratio will continue to move up and down alternately, and, in fact, it does.

However, the ratio goes up and down in successively smaller swings. First it goes from 1 to 2, but in later swings it never gets as low as l again, or as high as 2, either. Then it goes down from 2 to 1.5, and all future values are between 1.5 and 2. Then it goes up to 1.6666 ... and all future values are between 1.5 and 1.666....

The oscillation gets smaller and smaller and smaller, and with each step all future values are trapped between the smaller and smaller swings.

The oscillation never stops completely. No matter how far we follow out the series, and how immense the numbers get, the ratio will continue to swing, though by ever tinier amounts. This smaller and smaller swing will always be to one side and the other of some central value, which the ratio will get ever closer to without ever quite reaching. The central value is called the "limit" of the series.

What is the limit of the Fibonacci series?

Let us continue the series, starting with the last ratio we have already dealt with:

$$13/8 = 1.625$$
$$21/13 = 1.6153846...$$
$$34/21 = 1.6190476...$$
$$55/34 = 1.617647$$
$$89/55 = 1.6181818...$$
$$144/89 = 1.6179775...$$
$$233/144 = 1.6180555...$$
$$377/233 = 1.6180257...$$
$$610/377 = 1.6180371...$$

This is getting to look awfully suspicious. Let's switch to the two last ratios in the Fibonacci series of 21 members that I presented earlier:

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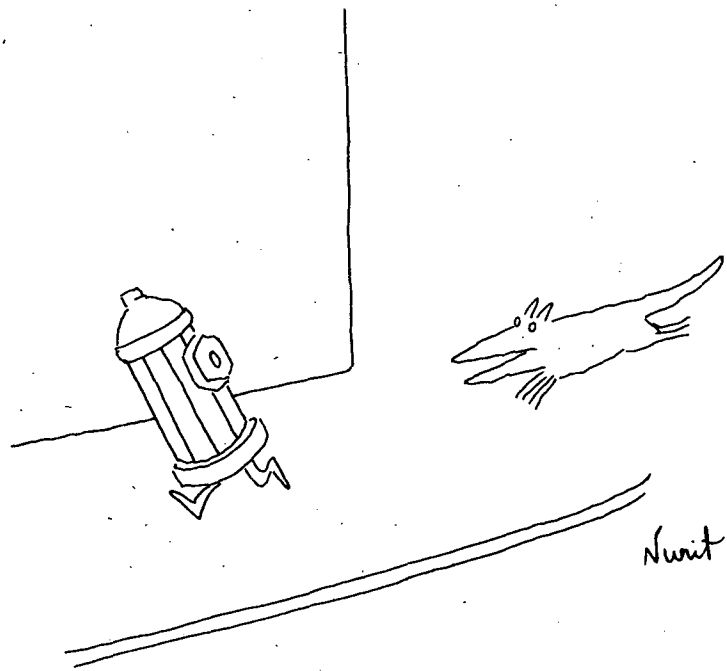
$$6765/4181 = 1.618033963...$$
$$10946/6765 = 1.618033998...$$

The oscillations are getting very small indeed, and they *seem* to be oscillating about the number that represents the golden section.

Can we be sure? Perhaps they are oscillating about a value that is microscopically different from the golden section.

No, that's not so. There are mathematical methods for determining the limit of such series, and one can demonstrate quite conclusively that the limit of the ratios of successive terms of a Fibonacci series is $1/2(1 + \sqrt{5})$.

Why is this so? I do not know, but the fact delights me. It is an example of the beauty of the unexpected that you can find everywhere in mathematics, if you have the talent for it. —As I, alas, have not.



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In which Kedrigern's princess, whose voice had long flown, regains her sweet speech through a toenail ingrown...

A Rarebit of Magic

BY
JOHN MORRESSY

The sun was warm, but not too warm for comfort; bright, but not dazzling to Kedrigern's overworked and slightly nearsighted eyes. Birds sang, but not too loudly, and every note rang clear. The mild breeze was freighted with rich fragrance. It was a perfect spring day.

Kedrigern made his unhurried way along the forest path, humming a little wordless tune which he made up as he walked to where his horse awaited. He was in excellent spirits, and at peace with the world. In plain fact, this spring day had filled him with the ebullient, unfocused glee of a small boy on holiday, and he was in a mood to do handsprings and cut capers right here on this green-roofed pathway. Only the pouch at his side, filled with freshly gathered herbs of great virtue, prevented him. The herbs were much too delicate to withstand gymnastics.

On an impulse, he laid the pouch gently at the base of a tree. He sprang into the air, tapping his heels together. Selecting a level open patch of green beside the path, he did a headstand. At last, laughing for pure joy, he tumbled onto his back and lay looking up at the sunny sky through the tapestry of new leaves.

And then, faint in the distance, he heard a moan.

At once he was on his feet, busily brushing himself off. His expression became somber. It would not do for ordinary citizens to see a respected senior wizard bounding about the woods like a silly lamb. Taking up his pouch of herbs and simples, he proceeded in the direction of the mournful sound, guided by frequent repetitions which became louder and more distinct as he drew near. His pace was stately, but rapid, and before long he came

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upon a huddled figure by the wayside.

It was a young man, dressed in once-gaudy finery which was now stained and worn from travel. He sat with his back to a flat rock, his bare feet stuck straight out before him. His hands were limp and forlorn in his lap, his head slumped forward in a posture of utter desolation. Looking about, Kedrigern saw a single boot lying a good way down the road, as if it had been flung there. Something unusual was going on here, he thought, and resolved to find out what it might be.

He cleared his throat, and in his most disarming voice said, "Good morrow, traveler. Is all well with you?"

At the first sound, the young man jerked up his head. He brushed back his tangled black hair and gazed up at Kedrigern with large, sad brown eyes. "Look you, sir, how I am crippled entirely with the curse of ingrown toenails, and it not ten days since Black Ivor Gruffydd placed it on me," said he in a deep voice speaking in a lilting manner that fell halfway between oratory and incantation.

"Ingrown toenails can be very painful. Particularly if one is required to do much walking," Kedrigern said sympathetically.

"True enough, that is. And a *cerddor* must do much walking, and that is to say nothing of taking care of his harp, and the keeping his head filled with sweet sound, or he will be forced to sleep in the woods and feed on nuts and berries," the young man lamented.

"Ah ... you're a minstrel, then."

"I am a minstrel now. But despite my youth, I was near to being *bardd teulu*, household bard to a great lord, and would now hold such a position of dignity, mind you, except for the dirty underhanded scheming of the Gruffydds to snatch away what was justly mine and give it to whining whey-faced Red Gruffydd."

"I've heard that it's a highly competitive business," said Kedrigern, "but didn't you say your enemy was Black Ivor? How does Red Gruffydd fit into this?"

"There is sharp you are, mister," said the young minstrel appreciatively. "It was Black Ivor Gruffydd put the curse on me, indeed, and him known as Black Ivor not for the color of hair or eyes or skin but for the black of his nature. I have not seen him, nor he me, since I left my home these two years gone. But I saw him at the fair ten days ago, where he was peddling his lechery and bawdry, and I said for all to hear what kind of nastiness is in him. And it is then he put the curse of ingrown toenails on me."

"What do you plan to do?"

The young man's eyes flashed, black as buttons. "I will soak my feet in a pail of the Gruffydd's blood, that is what I will do, as soon as I can walk without the pains of hell to cripple me."

"That's a bit drastic, isn't it? Surely it won't do anything for your toenails."

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"There is peace of mind it will give me, mister," the minstrel said grimly.

Kedrigern nodded, acknowledging the desirability of peace of mind. He settled down at the minstrel's side. For a time, neither of them spoke, then Kedrigern, looking off into the trees, said casually, "The local lord is a man we all call Breborn the Just. He got his name from his practice of tracking down and executing everyone suspected of crime in his domain. As a rule he hangs murderers, but every now and then he impales one. Just for a change."

"I would be away from here like smoke, look you. No man would find me."

"When you can hardly walk? Give it up, my boy. Revenge is silly. Very entertaining on the stage, but totally unworkable in day-to-day affairs," Kedrigern said with a wise, avuncular smile.

"There is a great fool I am, and have always been," said the minstrel with a deep sigh. "When we were lads, studying at the feet of the great *penceirdd* Twm ap Tudur, the Gruffydds learned all the spells for rapid advancement and discomfort to enemies, and far it is that their wicked knowledge has brought them."

"What did you learn?"

"Every spell for eloquence and sweetness of speech in the Green Book of Maelgwyn I have by heart. I can make the stones of the ground to sing, look you, and the croaking toad to converse with the voice of an angel. And I would trade it all for a charm to cure my ingrown toenails."

Kedrigern turned a broad, beaming smile on the woebegone minstrel and clapped him solidly on the shoulder. "It's a deal, my boy," he said.

"There is cruel you are to mock me, mister," said the youth.

"I'm not mocking you. I can get you back on your feet in no time. In exchange, I want you to use your spells for eloquence. I'm a wizard. Semi-retired at the moment, but I do private work in counterspells. The name's Kedrigern," said the wizard, extending a hand.

"And I am Rhys ap Gwallter," said the minstrel, accepting the offered welcome. "Though it is small need you have of my spells, mister, to hear the talking of you."

"It's more for a friend. You'll understand when we get to my house. We should arrive just in time for lunch," Kedrigern said, rising and brushing the leaves from his seat.

"I will be slow in the walking, look you. More like it will be breakfast time two days hence," Rhys warned.

"No need to walk at all. I'll summon my horse."

Rhys looked up, wide-eyed. "A great excitement it will be to me to see how a true wizard summons his horse."

Kedrigern frowned, puzzled. "Why? All I do is whistle."

"Oh," said the minstrel, crestfallen.

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Kedrigern thrust two fingers in his mouth and gave a sharp, long whistle. In a very short time, the sound of measured hoofbeats echoed up the forest path, and soon a shaggy black horse came into sight.

"That is a horse I would expect to see a great barbarian warrior riding, and not a kindly wizard," said Rhys, hauling himself to his feet.

"It belonged to a barbarian warrior once," Kedrigern said, recalling his encounter with Buroc the Depraved. "He got all stiffened up. Doesn't ride any more."

With a bit of assistance from Kedrigern, Ryhs ap Gwallter mounted the black horse. Kedrigern handed up the minstrel's harp and skimpy pack, and his own pouch of herbs, and they started off for the wizard's home, where Princess awaited.

As they emerged from the forest, and Silent Thunder Mountain loomed before them, far across the rolling grasslands, Rhys uncovered his small harp and began to play a sweet, sad melody. It was a very fine performance, but not at all suited to Kedrigern's mood, which was improving with every homeward step. He requested something merry, and the minstrel obliged.

Kedrigern was certain that he had at last found the solution to Princess' problem. The power of the charms over speech and eloquence known to the Cymric bards was the envy of wizard's everywhere. More than once, Kedrigern had given serious consideration to obtaining bardic help for his wife, but every time he had been discouraged by the bards' notorious reluctance to share their magic with outsiders. And now the magic of the Cymri was his for the asking, in exchange for a small, simple healing spell. It seemed to Kedrigern to be a sign that the universe was in good hands after all. He smiled placidly and began to hum along with the harp.

They arrived at the cottage just at midday. As Kedrigern was helping Rhys down from the horse, he felt the minstrel stiffen.

"What is that, now?" Rhys cried, alarmed.

A grotesque little creature, about knee-high, consisting almost entirely of a large ugly head, big hands and feet, and ears like wide-flung shutters, was bouncing up and down on the flagstones of the dooryard, salivating liberally. It cried "Yah! Yah!" joyously, in a piercing voice.

"Tell Princess I'm back, Spot," Kedrigern called, waving a greeting. As the little apparition bounded into the house, he said to the minstrel, "That's our house-troll. A good hard worker, and absolutely devoted to us."

"That is a thing I have never seen before," Rhys said guardedly.

"No, I suppose not. Well, you have to get them young, or it's no use at all, and it's not easy to find a troll with any kind of decent family background." At this point Spot reappeared, and Kedri-

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gern ordered the troll to bring a basin of warm salt water. "You can sit here in the sun and give your feet a nice restful soak until lunch is ready. After lunch we'll get down to business," he explained.

Princess appeared in the doorway. She wore a pale green robe, trimmed with white. Her ebony hair hung loose to her waist. A slim golden circlet bound her brows. Rhys ap Gwallter looked on, bedazzled by her beauty, as Kedrigern kissed her warmly, then took her hand and conducted her to their guest. She curtseyed deeply to his bow, then she smiled a smile that made the spring morning seem dull and cheerless by comparison. Without having spoken, she withdrew.

"There is a fine-looking woman your wife is, Master Kedrigern," said Rhys reverently. "I have seen queens and princesses and fine ladies, but next to her, look you, they are all as ugly as toads."

"Funny you should put it that way," Kedrigern said. "Would you believe, Rhys, that only—"

The arrival of Spot, bearing a great wooden tub of steaming water, interrupted Kedrigern's response. The troll set it down in front of a chair, and Rhys, at Kedrigern's bidding, immersed his pained feet in the tub with a great sigh of relief.

"Nothing like a good long soak when your feet hurt," Kedrigern said. "Make yourself comfortable. Lunch will be ready shortly. As I started to say," he went on, pulling up a chair for himself, "you'd hardly believe that only a few years ago, that beautiful woman was hopping about in a bog."

"In a bog, now? There is strange in that."

"Not so strange, actually. She was a toad at the time."

"A toad?"

"Yes. A fine-looking toad she was, too. I knew there was something special about that toad the minute I laid eyes on it."

"Why would such a woman want to be a toad, indeed?" Rhys asked.

"Oh, it wasn't her idea. Her parents had neglected to invite the local bog-fairy to her christening — the invitation went to some silly nixie by mistake — so the bog-fairy put a curse on the child. Princess turned into a toad on her eighteenth birthday. Didn't even get to open her presents. Bog-fairies can be very mean-minded when they think they've been insulted. Touchy lot."

"And you it was who changed her back into the lovely lady, then, with the magic of you?"

"Yes. As I mentioned earlier, I specialize in remedial magic. Counterspells and such, Undoing other people's nasty magic. Been remarkably successful at it, too, as you can see. There's only one small—"

Princess emerged from the doorway bearing a silver tray on which rested a chunk of deep golden cheese, a round of dark bread, and a square of

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pale yellow butter. Behind her bounded Spot, with a frost-coated pitcher in one hand and three stone mugs clutched in the other.

Kedrigern, rising and bidding Rhys remain seated, pulled up a chair for Princess, kissed her cheek, and took the tray.

"Brereep," she said, smiling gloriously.

Rhys gave a little start. Water sloshed from the tub, darkening the flagstones.

"I was just telling Rhys about our first meeting, my dear, and how I used my arts to restore you to your proper — and most exquisite — form. Rhys is having a bit of a problem himself, with a curse someone has placed on him," Kedrigern said as he helped Princess to her seat.

"Brereep?" she asked.

"Exactly, my dear. And in return, Rhys will place at our service his knowledge of the Cymric spells for eloquence and sweetness of speech, which he has learned from the Green Book of Maelgwyn. I believe we've found the solution to your troubles at last, my dear," Kedrigern said, patting her hand tenderly.

"Brereep? Brereep!" she exclaimed happily.

"Look you now, this is a bit more complicated than I thought it might be," Rhys said apprehensively.

"Surely the power of the Green Book of Maelgwyn can deal with a little croak," Kedrigern said, pouring foaming ale into the first mug.

"A great difference there is, Master Kedrigern, between taking a tongue-tied *creddor* and instilling in him sweetness of discourse, and taking a lady who croaks like a toad — a very fine and melodious croak it is, lady, I do assure you—" he quickly added, "and putting words to her tongue. Oh, a very great difference, indeed."

"We have every confidence in you, Rhys, and in the Green Book of Maelgwyn," Kedrigern said, pouring into the second mug. "And if our confidence is misplaced, you will find your toenails growing out of the top of your head."

"Brereep," Princess said softly. She shook her head and placed her hand on Kedrigern's forearm.

Kedrigern's sighed, nodded, and said contritely, "Yes, of course, my dear. You're absolutely right. That was in bad form." Handing Rhys ap Gwallter the foam-capped mug, he said, "There will be no reprisals, my boy. You must do your best for Princess, and in return, I will free you of Black Ivor's curse. Agreed?"

"Agreed," the minstrel said eagerly, looking much relieved.

They partook of a leisurely and satisfying lunch. When they had finished, and Spot had removed the dishes and empty mugs, and Rhys had dried his feet and donned a pair of soft slippers provided by his host, Rhys readied himself for the curing of Princess. He took up his small harp, struck a few

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notes, tightened two of the strings, played the notes once more, and then cleared his throat.

"For my first charm, I will attempt Ceiriog's spell of unlocking," he announced with a pleasant smile. "It is much favored for stirring speech in those who appear reluctant or incapable."

"That sounds as though it might fit," said Kedrigern.

"Brereep," Princess agreed.

"Do you want me to leave? I'd really like to stay and watch, but if I'm going to make you nervous...," Kedrigern said, half-rising.

"I am accustomed to an audience, Master Kedrigern. Stay," said the minstrel.

The wizard smiled gratefully and resumed his seat. Rhys struck a chord, then began to play a simple melody, like a child's song, to which he sang lyrics of great subtlety and very sophisticated poetic technique. When he was done, he put down his harp and he and Kedrigern turned to Princess.

"How is it with you, lady?" Rhys asked cautiously.

Princess took a deep breath, swallowed, let out the breath, blinked twice, drew a more normal breath, and slowly said, "I can talk."

"That's marvelous, my dear! Well done, Rhys!" Kedrigern cried.

"Oh! Oh! I can talk!" Princess repeated, rising from her chair.

"On the first try! Oh, this is wonderful, my dear!"

"Do you hear me talk?"

"Yes. It's lovely," Kedrigern said warmly.

"Look! Look!" she shouted, and the two men twisted their necks in sudden alarm. But they saw only the little troll, who reappeared and was now running about, picking up scraps and tidying the front yard.

"See Spot run!" she cried. "Run, Spot, run!"

"Yes, my dear," said Kedrigern, dubiously.

She turned to him, and the look in her eyes was enough to wring his heart. "I can talk. Do you hear me talk? I talk *dumb!*"

"Considering that it's only a starting point...," Kedrigern began, looking to Rhys for encouragement.

"Look you, Ceiriog's spell is a great thing for the children, but I am thinking that maybe it is not such a good thing for a grownup," Rhys said, with an uneasy glance at Princess.

"I talk like a baby. I am a lady. I want to talk like a lady. I do not want to sound like a baby all my life," said Princess. Kedrigern noticed that she was getting a bit red in the face.

"I will try something else," said Rhys.

"Oh! Oh! I hope it works. If it doesn't—"

"Now, my dear," Kedrigern said, reaching out to pat her hand. "We mustn't upset the young man. He's doing his best."

She seated herself demurely, fold-

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ing her hands in her lap. "I will be good," she said.

Rhys took up his harp once again. This time, the melody he played was so intricate, and so lively, that it filled Kedrigern and Princess with wonder to see it played by only two hands and ten fingers. The chant that he sang to this whirlwind of music was dark and harsh, and impossible to follow. Kedrigern recognized all the signs of a powerful charm, and kept a close eye on Princess. She seemed fascinated by the web of words and sounds, but quite alert.

At last Rhys laid his harp down, and wiped his brow, damp from the strain of concentration. In the silence, Princess spoke. Her words came slowly, as if she were choosing each syllable and placing it as carefully as an artisan might place the stones of a mosaic.

Mute, tame, Oh! long my tongue lay;
Maelgwyn's words made go away
Toad's gruff croak. T'was good coming
Brought Rhys, best bard, to sing.

Ryhs ap Gwallter looked at Princess with awe, and joy, and an expression that rapidly came to resemble that of a man who has scuffed his foot in the pebbles of a pathway and come upon a tub of precious gems. He turned expectantly to Kedrigern, who was gazing vacantly at his wife.

"Look you now, there is poetry for you!" Rhys cried proudly. "That is the true *cywydd*, embellished with the beauties of *cynghanedd*. Oh, that is fine, indeed."

"Is she always going to talk that way?" Kedrigern asked without taking his eyes off Princess.

"She will improve with practice. There was a bit of weakness in the second line, where the rhyme should properly have come on an unstressed syllable, and I did not count more than three consonants recurring in any line. But it is very tidy for a first effort. In a few years the lady will be a great bard," Rhys said confidently.

"A few years...? Will I ever know what she's talking about?" Kedrigern murmured, dazed.

Great bard? I grant better days
May follow — but must always
I be rhyming? Right cramping
T'would be; word bound. Better sing
Small songs, some lesser in grace,
Quite modest, neat, con monplace;
Speak as plain lass, prosily—
So my dear deciphers me, said the Princess.

Kedrigern scratched his head, working on her utterance. The last line had sounded very good, but he was not sure about what went before. Poetry was not his forte.

"That was a proper first line," Rhys said respectfully. "Five consonants I counted, repeated in order. You do not often find that in a beginner, lady. Are you certain you do not wiss to speak forever in *cywydd*, adorning your verses with *cynghanedd*?"

Princess smiled to acknowledge the

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compliment, but she shook her head decisively. After a pause, she said,

Plain discourse will please me best;
Simple speech is the sweetest.

Kedrigern sighed with relief. Rhys ap Gwallter shook his head slowly, sadly, as if at a great act of ingratitude, but took up his harp once more.

"For my third charm, I will recite something that has long been a favorite of mine. It is a simple rhyming spell that is attributed to Hywel Morgan," said the minstrel.

"Don't you know anything that doesn't involve rhyming?" Kedrigern asked plaintively.

"I have tried a spell without rhyme to it, and it was a disaster, with this lovely lady speaking like a three-year-old, and not a very clever one, look you."

"Just asking. Go right ahead with Hywel Morgan's spell."

Rhys began again, and this time his music was merry and bright, a tune to dance to. His small audience could not refrain from tapping their feet in time with the harp. The words were quick and clever, and several times Princess and Kedrigern glanced at one another and shared a smile. Rhys ended on an abrupt chord and looked at Princess with an expectant grin.

"Speak to us now, lady!" he cried.

"Your magic has worked like a charm! It has done me all good, and no harm."

"I have done it this time," Rhys said proudly.

"But she still speaks in rhyme," Kedrigern pointed out.

"Stop complaining, and give me your arm!" Princess said.

Kedrigern did as she bade him. Princess pulled him to his feet, and with her arm in his, they danced around the beaming young minstrel. At last, flushed and breathless, they fell into their chairs, laughing for sheer joy. Princess leaned forward and laid her hand on Rhys's. Giggling a bit, brushing back a long strand of hair, she said, "Young man, you're an absolute winner! I insist on your staying to dinner. I'll give orders to Spot, to get everything hot—"

"You speak well, my dear, for a beginner," Kedrigern observed.

"Look you now," Rhys asked, "Could you fix my feet? There is pain."

"Do it promptly, my sweet," Princess said. "I'm sure you know how."

Kedrigern rose, saying, "I'll see to it now."

"There is plenty of time till we eat," Princess assured them.

She left them, and Kedrigern set about his part of the bargain. Black Ivor Gruffydd's spell turned out to be simple one, and he removed it easily. As he pronounced the last word of the counterspell, Rhys's face lit up with relief, and he heaved a great sigh.

"There is good you are with your magic, Master Kedrigern," he said. "I did not feel a thing."

Kedrigern gave a self-deprecating smile and waved off the compliment.

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"No reason you should. It was a small spell."

"It did not feel so small when it was in my feet."

"They never do. Rhys ... I'm curious about something...."

"I will answer you gladly," said the minstrel, rising.

"It seems to me ... now, maybe I've just got rhyming on my mind ... but it seems to me that when we were talking with Princess just now, we were all falling into rhyme. Is that right?"

Rhys ap Gwallter took a few gingerly steps. He grinned at Kedrigern, walked firmly around his chair, then did a vigorous little dance. "Better than ever I am, look you, Master Kedrigern. I could walk from here to the ocean without stopping, thanks to you. Yes, it may be that we were all rhyming. The charm is fresh and new, you see, and it spreads out around the lady, touching others."

"Will it always be like that?"

"The rhyming is a fragile gift. Indeed, if the lady does not remain in constant practice, she will be speaking in prose before you know it," Rhys said.

Kedrigern smiled. "All things considered, that might be for the best."

That night, the three of them dined lavishly and drank deeply of Kedrigern's most treasured stock, the very best from the vineyards of Vosconu the Openhanded. It was well into morning when the last song was sung, and the last health was drunk. With muffled yawns and weary "good-nights," Kedrigern and Princess left Rhys to curl up on a soft mat before the fire while they made their way to their bedchamber.

Kedrigern awoke to a bright morning, refreshed by a night's unbroken rest. He yawned and stretched, and turned to Princess. She was already awake, and was staring up with a preoccupied air.

"My dear, did you have a good sleep?" he asked.

She replied thoughtfully, "For a time, it was restful and deep. But I woke with a cry—"

"Did you really? But why?"

"I dreamed I'd relapsed to 'Brereep.'"

He took her hand and pressed it for reassurance. She snuggled closer, and they lay warm and quiet for a little while. Then Princess said, "Did you notice, my dear, that we rhyme?"

"It will go away in a short time," Kedrigern replied, automatically. Then, thinking on her words, he realized that he really was falling into the patterns of his wife's speech. It was all harmless, he knew; but something in him made him chary of all spells. "Let us rise," he said tersely.

"Yes," said Princess. "It's best we consider our guest."

Kedrigern nodded, but remained warily silent. As they entered the dining hall, Princess in the lead, Rhys sat up, scratching himself and looking about confusedly. Kedrigern signaled to him to remain silent. The minstrel, seeing his gestures, looked even more

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confused, and asked, "Look you now, what is this pantomime?"

So Kedrigern gave up the struggle. All that day and the next, any conversation that took place in the presence of Princess was in limerick form, and there were no deviations from the rule. If Kedrigern deliberately tried to jumble the rhythm, the outcry from Spot supplied the missing beats. But when, on the morning of the third day after his arrival, Rhys ap Gwallter left them, the rhyming charm seemed to depart with him. Princess spoke in a voice as sweet and musical as an angel, but she spoke in prose.

As they sat over lunch, Kedrigern said, "It took a long time, my dear, but you have your voice back at last."

"Thanks to you, Keddie. I knew you'd do it."

"I've disappointed you a number of times, I'm afraid. I needed Rhys's charms to bring it about."

"If it weren't for your powers, Rhys would never have helped you. I've heard you say hundreds of times that the bards of Cymri are very close with their magic. More ale?"

"Just a drop, thank you." Kedrigern reflected for a time, and said, "Yes, I suppose you're right. It's all professional courtesy, but nothing would have been done if I weren't a wizard of some standing."

"Exactly. So the credit is yours."

"It was a privilege, my dear. And now that you're speaking again, what shall we do to celebrate? Shall we invite a few friends, and have a party?"

"All my friends are toads," Princess pointed out. "Not much point inviting *them*. And your friends are scattered all over the place."

"True," Kedrigern said, nodding. "Perhaps we could take a little trip. There's a convention coming up. I hadn't planned on going — you know how I am about travel — but if you'd like to—"

"It's hard to think. Actually, all I want to do for a time is talk. I want to talk about the meaning of life, and gossip about people I hardly know, and I want to discuss great art and literature and music, and tell silly jokes, and sing songs, and recite poetry, and complain about the way you leave indescribable things lying about the house when you're in the middle of an enchantment—"

"I'm sorry, my dear. I didn't realize—"

"And congratulate you when you work a difficult magic just right. And talk with another woman about all the things that interest me but don't interest you."

"We could invite the wood-witch for a weekend. Bess is a good sort."

"That's a start. I want to talk and talk and talk, Keddie. I want to say everything."

"I'm sure there's one thing you won't be saying."

"What's that, my love?"

"Brereep," he said.

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F&SF Competition

REPORT ON COMPETITION 31

In the August issue we asked competitors to submit humorous scholarly paper titles, the format being: "evocative title: descriptive title." Not quite as many responses as usual, but the quality held up well.

FIRST PRIZE

That's Why Delany Is A Tramp: A Harsh Critique of *Dahlgren*

Ignorance Is Blish: The Scientific Errors of *Cities in Flight*

Darth Be Not Proud: The Fatal Flaw of Lord Vader

Tiptree Through the Tulips: Alice Sheldon's Influence on Dutch SF

Eyesick Ashy Mauve: The Purple Prose of the *Foundation* Trilogy

—Jean MacKay Jackson
Tulsa, Ok

SECOND PRIZE

Don't Touch That Dial!: Alien Artifacts and Cosmic Cataclysms

Adamant Eve: Dying Races and the Genesis of the Headache Myth

Good Guise and Bad Guise: Impersonation and Deception in *Find the Changeling*

Home on Derange: Mad Scientists and German Accents in the Pulps

Things that Go Bump and Grind in the Night: Horror Fiction in the Men's Magazines

—John E. Stith
Colorado Springs, CO

RUNNERS UP

Your Mother Wears Army Boots: Women As Soldiers in Haldeman's *Forever War*

Rotten to the Corps: Keith Laumer's Retief as a Role Model for Diplomats

Bolts from the Blue: Future High-Tech Construction Methods in the works of Heinlein and Clarke

The Fog Comes On Little Cat Feet: Nebulosity in Harlan Ellison's "Catman"

—Bruce Berges
Inglewood, CA

I'm So Hungry I could Eat A Horace: Anthropophagy in Science Fiction

Strange Whine: The Science Fiction of Child Development

—William Meltzer
Salt Lake City, UT

Frodo Finnish: Northern European Translations of *The Ring*

I've Grown Accustomed to Your...: The Multi-Race Erotica of Philip J. Farmer

The Shape of Things That Came: Temporal Displacement in Science Fiction

—R. G. Duling
Indianapolis, IN

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The Downstairs Womb: Women's Roles in the Early Short Fiction of Kate Wilhelm

Angst-iety: The Works of Barry N. Malzberg

In Search of Blunder: SF Criticism I - The Beginning

The Tissue at Hand: SF Criticism II
—Michael Croteau
Pleasanton, CA

Love at First Byte: A Theoretical Investigation of the Possible Relationships Between Robots Within the Framework of Asimov's Three Laws

Guess What's Coming to Dinner: An Analysis of the Treatment of Sexual Relationships Between Humans and Non-Humans in Science Fiction
—Richard J. Coppins
Midlothian, VA

COMPETITION 32 (suggested by Steve Leavell and Stephen Mendenhall)

Submit up to a dozen sequels for any SF work, e.g.:

More More Than Human by Sturgeon
20,001 Leagues Under the Sea by Verne
A Transatlantic Tunnel, Hurrah!
Another Transatlantic Tunnel, Yawn. by Harrison

Rules: Send entries to Competition Editor, F&SF, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Entries must be received by January 15. Judges are the editors of F&SF; their decision is final. All entries become the property of F&SF; none can be returned.

Prizes: First prize, eight different hard cover science fiction books. Second prize, 20 different sf paperbacks, Runners-up will receive one-year subscriptions to F&SF. Results of Competition 32 will appear in the May Issue.

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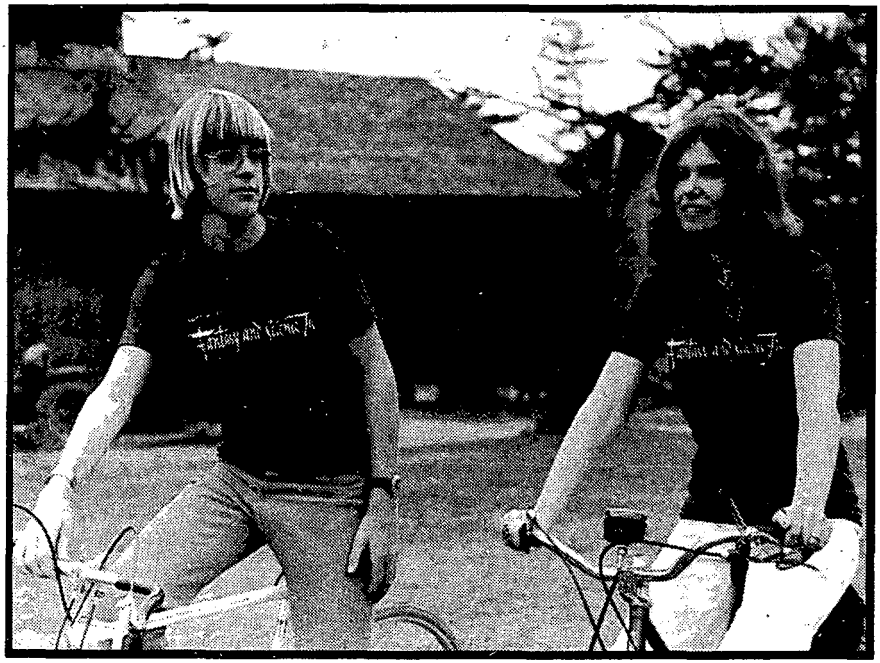

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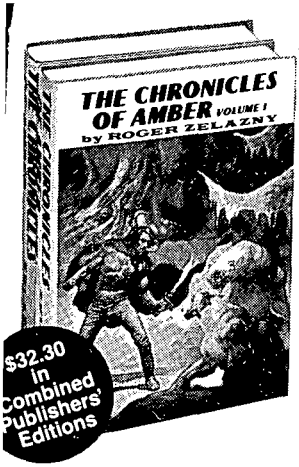

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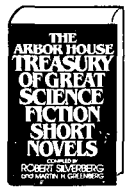

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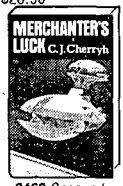

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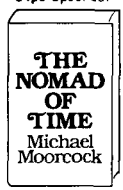

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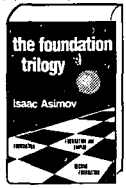

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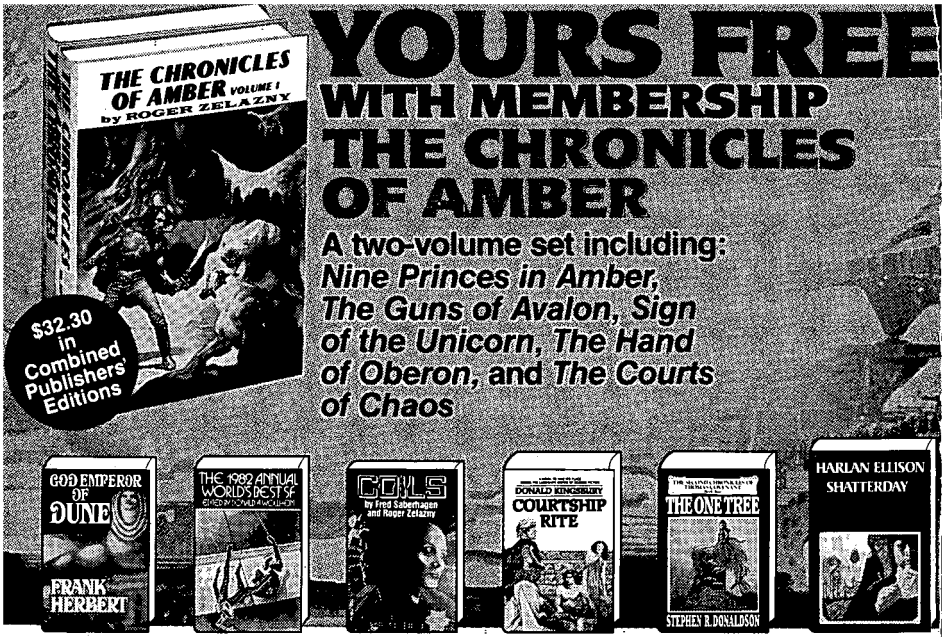
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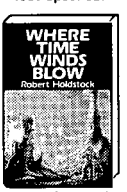

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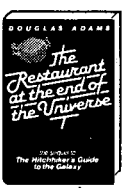

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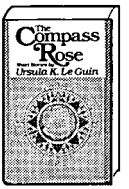

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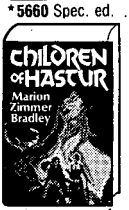

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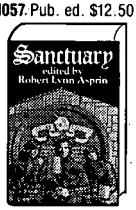

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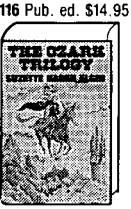

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